



# VERMONT **STARS**

## **Guidance Manual**

A user guide for Vermont's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for early childhood education and afterschool programs.

October 6, 2023

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## Essential Resources for STARS Programs

### **CDD STARS Team**

Child Development Division, NOB 1 North 280 State Drive, Waterbury, Vermont 05671-1040

[STARS@vermont.gov](mailto:STARS@vermont.gov)

(800) 649-2642, option 8

### **System for Program Access for Quality Supports (SPARQS)**

<https://www.vtaeyc.org/our-programs/>

### **Vermont Business and Technical Assistance Program (BTAP)**

<https://www.firstchildrensfinance.org/vermont/>

## Introduction

### **What is STARS?**

- STARS stands for STep Ahead Recognition System.
- STARS is Vermont's QRIS (Quality Recognition and Improvement System) for early childhood and afterschool programs.
- STARS is a framework for early childhood and afterschool programs to assess, improve and communicate the quality of their programs and services.

STARS measures early childhood and afterschool program quality with five increasing levels of achievement. Each STARS level contains standards that your program must meet in order to demonstrate it achieves that level of quality. All regulated programs that are in good standing with Vermont licensure are automatic participants in STARS and receive STARS level 1 status. Programs at STARS levels 2, 3, 4, or 5 have demonstrated the intent to go beyond the standards of licensure and STARS acknowledges them for their quality.

STARS is informed by the unique culture and identity of quality practices in Vermont's early childhood and afterschool programs and offers equitable opportunities for programs and providers to engage in the system. Revised in 2022, the

current STARS model focuses Vermont's efforts more closely on positive outcomes for children, family engagement, and support of early childhood and afterschool programs.

## **STARS Vision**

All Vermont children and families have access to high-quality early learning and afterschool programs.

## **STARS Mission**

STARS recognizes and supports regulated center-based, home-based and afterschool programs building high-quality practices that maximize positive outcomes for each and every child.

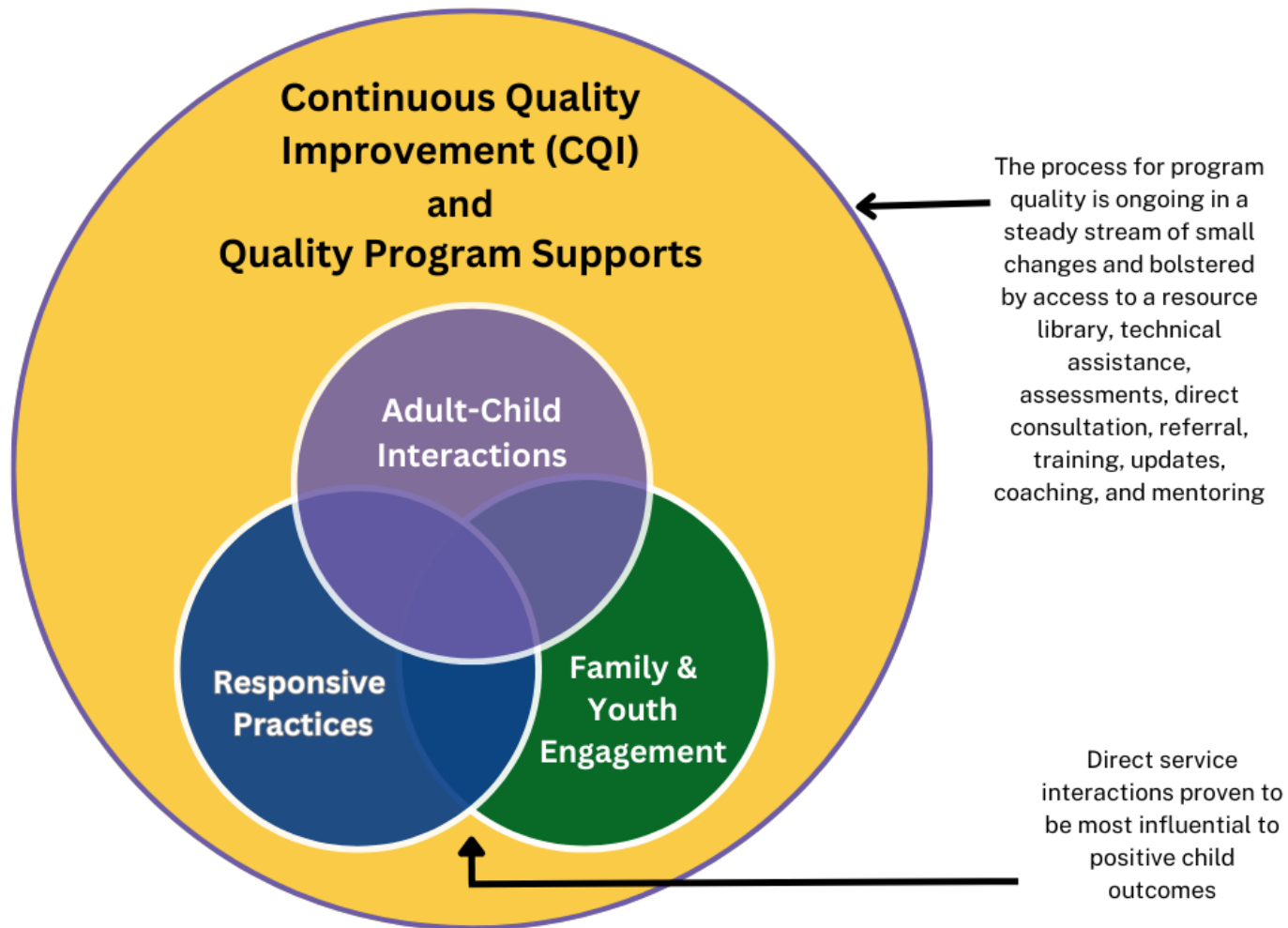
## **How to Use This Guidance Manual**

STARS uses Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) as its foundation. CQI is the process of creating an environment where programs strive to build constantly improving quality. This guidance manual is a reference for building your program's STARS CQI Plan and meeting the STARS standards of quality at each level. Your STARS CQI Plan is an action plan of goals, methods, and tests for your program's quality improvement. It is also used for applying to STARS for the first time, to attain a higher STARS level or to renew your current STARS certificate.

Your program's CQI Plan demonstrates how your program meets or is striving to meet STARS standards. You can use this manual to find a full explanation of STARS standards, the specific evidence required to meet those standards, and resources available to support program quality. The following sections include detailed steps for building a STARS CQI Plan. You can access CQI Plan examples and templates at the end of this manual, along with other form templates, resources, and a list of definitions for terms used in STARS.

More resources are also available to help you build your program quality and develop your STARS CQI Plan. For further clarification or questions not answered in this guidance, you can contact the CDD STARS Team at [STARS@vermont.gov](mailto:STARS@vermont.gov) or 800-649-2642, option 8. CDD has newly implemented the System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports ([SPARQS](#)) which will soon be providing assessments and offering coaching in assessment, CQI, Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) and a resource library.

## STARS Program Improvements to Support Positive Child Outcomes



## STARS Components: Levels, Standards & Content Areas

### Measuring Quality

STARS recognizes programs that build and maintain practices that have the greatest impact on positive outcomes for children. STARS focuses on three research-driven elements of quality that produce those positive outcomes: **adult-child interactions**, **family and youth engagement** and **responsive practices**.

### STARS Elements of Quality

- **Adult Child Interactions:** Using positive adult child interactions to support social, emotional, and intellectual growth.
- **Family & Youth Engagement:** Engaging families and youth using program structures and practices to create respectful, responsive, reciprocal relationships with families and youth. These relationships are partnerships in development and learning and are responsive to each family's and youth's cultural norms.
- **Responsive Practices:** Implementing culturally, developmentally, linguistically, and individually responsive learning activities that promote all areas of child development and are informed by family and youth voice.



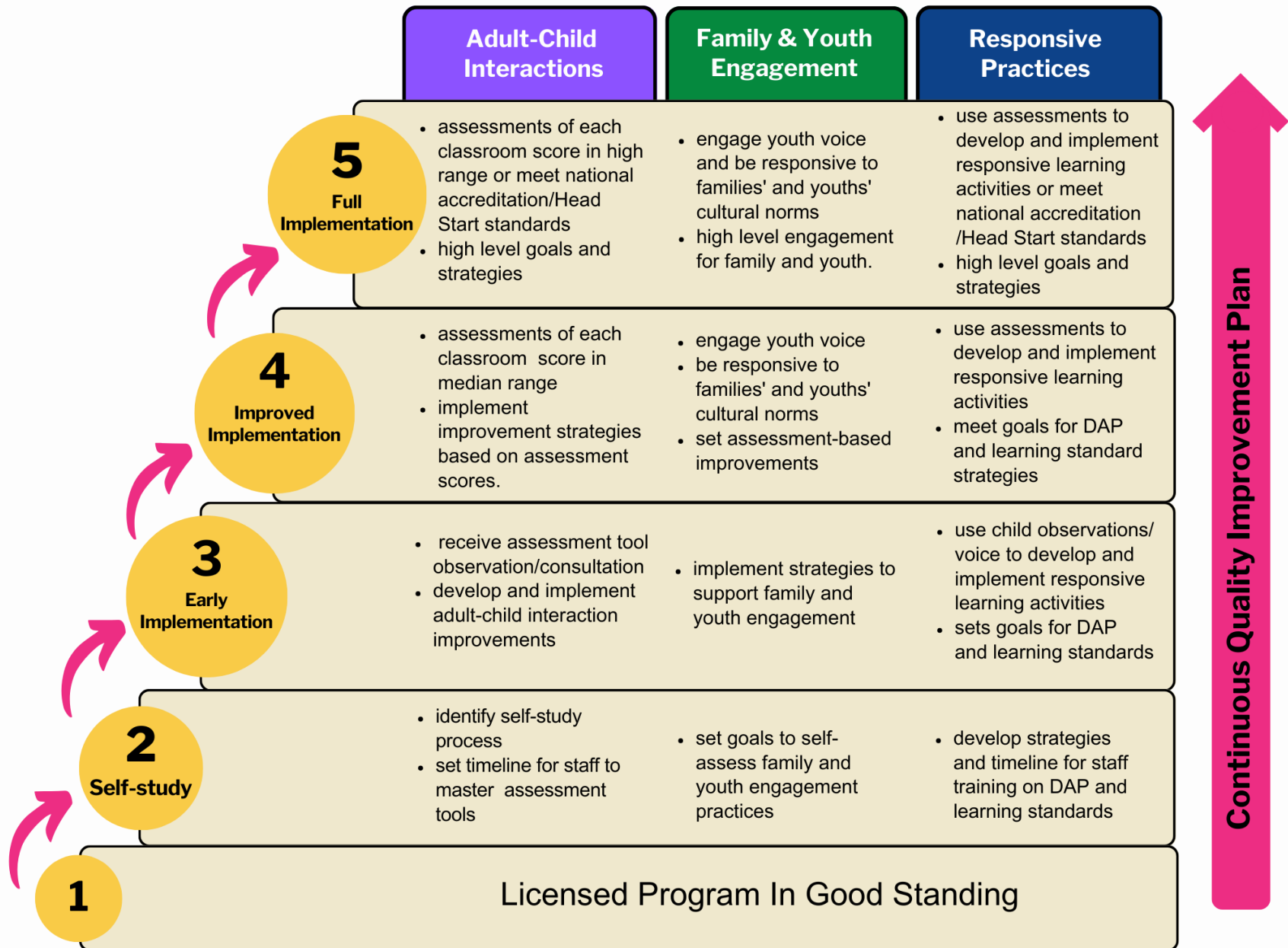
A graphic demonstrating the three STARS elements of quality: Adult-Child Interactions, Family and Youth Engagement, and Responsive Practices.

These STARS elements of quality are inspired by Vermont's Early Education Guiding Principles (see pg. 41), the Weikart Center's [Pyramid of Program Quality](#), the Center for the Study of Social Policy's [Strengthening Families](#) and [Youth Thrive](#) frameworks, [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#), Vermont Guidelines for Afterschool and Youth Programs, [NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice](#) and research findings that show supportive interactions between children and adults have the greatest impact on positive outcomes for children.

## **STARS Standards & Levels**

STARS' five levels include standards in each of the three STARS elements of quality. STARS standards help you set goals for **what** your program needs to do to maintain or improve quality. Evidence is required for each standard to show **how** your program achieves its goals.

The five STARS levels start from a self-study stage that prepares programs to make quality improvements. Each level builds upon the previous one by asking your program to use evidence-based practices to implement strategies for improvement.



A graphic showing the STARS level standards grouped by elements of quality.

## STARS Model of Continuous Quality Improvement

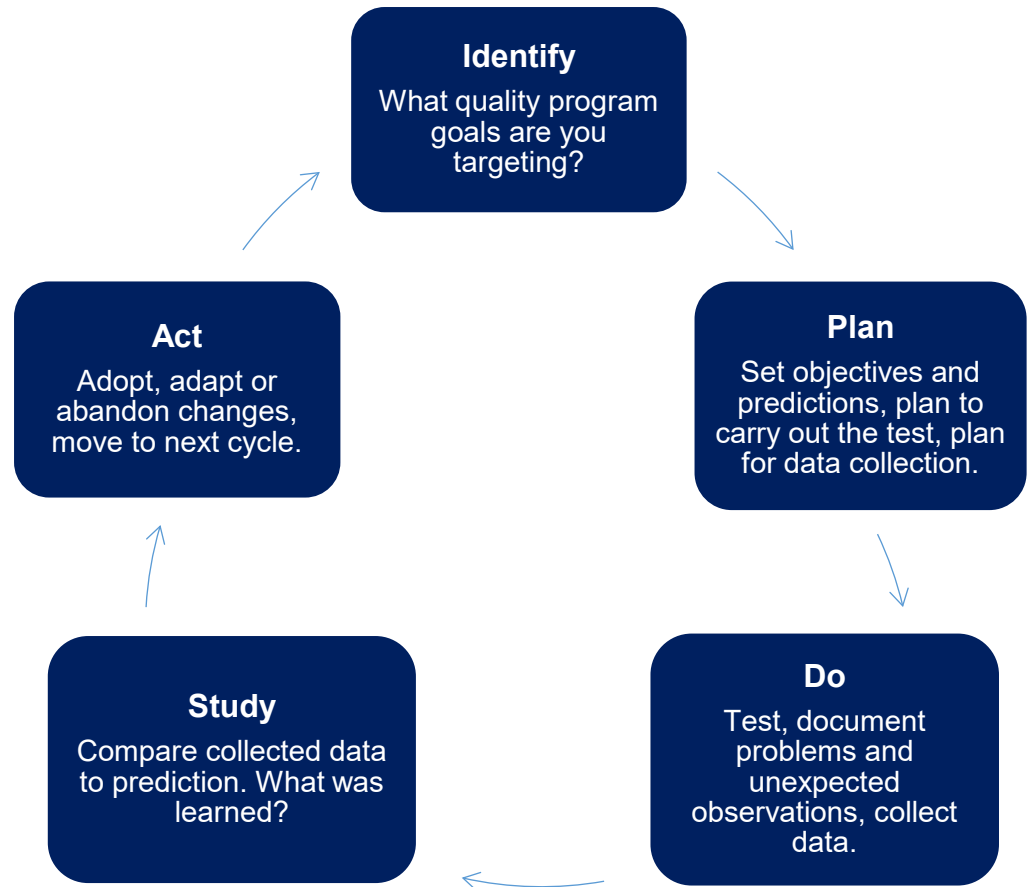
### The CQI Process

The STARS process for program quality is ongoing. At each STARS level, your program engages in a process of continuous quality improvement (CQI) with a STARS CQI Plan that identifies opportunities to increase quality, researches solutions, develops and implements your improvement strategies, and tests those strategies for effectiveness. In this way, your program progresses toward its quality goals continuously in a steady stream of small changes. Your CQI plan also helps you make a habit of tracking practices and using information as part of everyday practice to improve outcomes.

### CQI Plan Description

Your CQI plan will describe your program's approach to improved quality. Programs are unique and serve children and families who are unique. Your program's CQI plan should be flexible and specific to your program while including the following general components:

- State a clear, guiding mission for the CQI work.
- Identify measurable goals and objectives to improve outcomes.
- Research methods to best implement improvements.
- Develop a method to implement your program's goal(s).
- Implement your method of improvement and track results.
- Analyze the effectiveness of your method and plan the next steps.



This flow chart shows the cycle of steps in the CQI process.

Figure 3: The cycle of steps in the CQI process.

## Goals and Objectives

Your CQI plan should succinctly describe CQI goals and objectives that align with your CQI mission and that are informed by program data. Your program must identify at least two goals per element of quality in each certificate cycle (3 years).

**Goals** identify your general intentions, such as “improve the quality of teacher-child interactions.” **Objectives** are clear and measurable targets set to meet the overall goal, such as, “show improved scores in the Emotional Support Domain of the CLASS.”

## Implementation

Your CQI plan must describe the actions your program will take to achieve the CQI goals and objectives, and how you will determine if the changes made were effective. These actions may be most successful if they reflect proven and promising practices in the field or build from your own findings. If your changes need further input and development, describe how you will accomplish that.

## Progress Tracking and Assessment

Describe your program’s strategy for tracking its CQI work: collecting, storing, analyzing, and interpreting information. The measures you select might be measures you are already using for reporting or other purposes and can be used as evidence in your CQI Plan. Your program will use lessons learned from implementation to assess CQI activities moving forward.

### SMARTIE OBJECTIVES

A good way to identify what you are trying to accomplish, how much, and by when is to use the **SMARTIE** acronym. Developing objectives that are SMARTIE will help you determine whether the objectives have been met each time you revisit your CQI plan.

**SMARTIE** objectives are:

- **S**pecific and Strategic
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable and Action-oriented
- **R**elevant and Results-focused
- **T**imed and Tracked
- **I**nclusive
- **E**quitable

This framework can be used to set 90-day goals and track quarterly progress. A limited set of measures allows data to be reviewed frequently to spur reflection and testing of new ideas.

**SMARTIE objectives are specific and strategic, measurable, achievable, and action-oriented, relevant, and results-focused, timed and tracked, inclusive, and equitable.**

## Building Your STARS CQI Plan with Evidence to Meet Standards

In order to earn a STARS Level, your program's CQI plan will identify goals, actions and evidence that meet the STARS Standards for that level. The standards are listed under the **STARS Level Standards and Evidence** section of this guidance manual (see pages 12 - 21). Standards include requirements for assessment, training and CQI.

The evidence charts for each STARS level indicate options for the types of evidence that can document progress toward standards in your CQI plan. It is not necessary to include all types of suggested evidence, but the reviewer of your CQI Plan may ask for additional evidence if the information submitted is not sufficient to demonstrate that you have met the standards.

You will organize and upload your evidence and CQI Plan it via an on-line link or ePortfolio platform. The same piece of evidence may illustrate more than one standard, but you must upload it separately for each standard it supports.

To protect the privacy and identity of youth and their families, any evidence your program submits must redact Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and/or Protected Health Information (PHI). One method to redact PII and PHI is to highlight text in black.

Suggested types of evidence:

- ✓ **Quality credential accounts**--Trainings, degrees or coursework verified by individual credential accounts (BFIS, CDDIS). You do not need to attach them to your program portfolio.
- ✓ **Completed forms\***—Examples of forms include:
  - Self- assessment
  - IPDP (individual professional development plan)
  - Learning activity plan form
  - Self-study plan form
  - Observation record

\*Forms must be completed: a blank form will not be accepted as evidence.

- ✓ **Child observations**—Can be used for assessment, screening, or to determine interest. For children and youth in afterschool programs, surveys or group meeting notes can take the place of observations.

- ✓ **Communication example**--Email, social media post, newsletter or other types of communication that demonstrates implementation strategies the program used to meet the standards.
- ✓ **Survey result information**—For example, family and youth surveys. Please include a summary of results rather than individual survey responses.
- ✓ **Learning activity plan**--Will show connections between observations, surveys, assessments, screenings, and goals. Plan templates and examples are linked at the end of this Manual, but programs may also use their own if the information shared meets the expectations for demonstrating connections of learning activities.
- ✓ **Coaching/Consultation Reports**--Records of the coaching/consultation/assessment process provided to the program by the coach-consultant-observer to demonstrate progress toward goals.
- ✓ **Participation in STARS workgroups**--Are evidence of progress toward a goal and must provide the topic and meeting dates for the workgroups. Participation will be verified by the group facilitator.
- ✓ **Written reflection** may demonstrate knowledge of a topic.

## System for Program Access for Quality Supports (SPARQS)

You may find that you need additional support to improve your program's quality. All STARS programs are eligible and encouraged to access the System for Program Access for Quality Supports (SPARQS), which is currently in development. Through SPARQS, you will have access to a resource library, technical assistance, direct consultation, referral, training, updates, coaching, and mentoring.

SPARQS will also provide program assessments for programs to use in their CQI process for STARS. More information on SPARQS will be posted as soon as it is available.

## STARS Levels Standards and Evidence

### STARS Level 1 Standards and Evidence

All regulated early childhood and afterschool programs in good standing automatically earn STARS level 1 status. At this level, programs are meeting the Vermont licensure requirements.

| LEVEL 1 STANDARDS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Suggested EVIDENCE to Support CQI Plan        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| The program demonstrates it is licensed in good standing with VT Child Care Licensing regulations. Programs with a license in provisional, intent to suspend, suspended, intent to revoke, or revoked status are not eligible for participation in STARS. | No evidence required; CDD verifies licensure. |

## STARS Level 2 and the Self-Study Process

The self-study process for STARS level 2 will be the foundation of the CQI plan for your program. For licensed early childhood programs including public school operated pre-K programs, each classroom or group will demonstrate they, as a group, have acquired knowledge on each of the required topics:

- Vermont Early Learning Standards,
- Developmentally Appropriate Practices,
- External Program Assessment,
- Child Observation,
- Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Settings, and  
Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment or Youth Thrive Survey.

### Calculating Knowledge by Program Type

**For home-based programs**, the CQI plan meets the STARS standards if it addresses knowledge gaps for the provider to meet at least 50% of the knowledge requirements listed above.

**For center-based programs**, UPK partners, and public school operated Pre-K programs, the CQI plan meets the STARS standards if it addresses the combined knowledge gaps of staff for each classroom or group.

**For afterschool programs**, the CQI plan meets the STARS standards if it addresses the combined knowledge gap of all program staff.

At level 2, staff also become familiar with external program assessment such as CLASS, PQA and Early MTSS so that they can successfully understand and plan for improvements once they receive an external assessment by an outside observer at levels 3, 4 and 5.

Your CQI Plan should detail how a classroom or group determines if it meets the standard or identifies actions to meet the standard. Please see the Self-Study Process chart on page 16 for determining knowledge gaps to address in the CQI plan for STARS level 2.

### **Which External Assessment is Best for My Program?**

The following is a description of each of the external assessments used in STARS and the program type they are intended for.

#### **CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)\***

CLASS is the STARS assessment for Center Based, Home Based and Public Pre-K Programs. The current version used by STARS is Infant, Toddler and CLASS 2<sup>nd</sup> edition for Pre-K aged children.

#### **PQA (Program Quality Assessment)\***

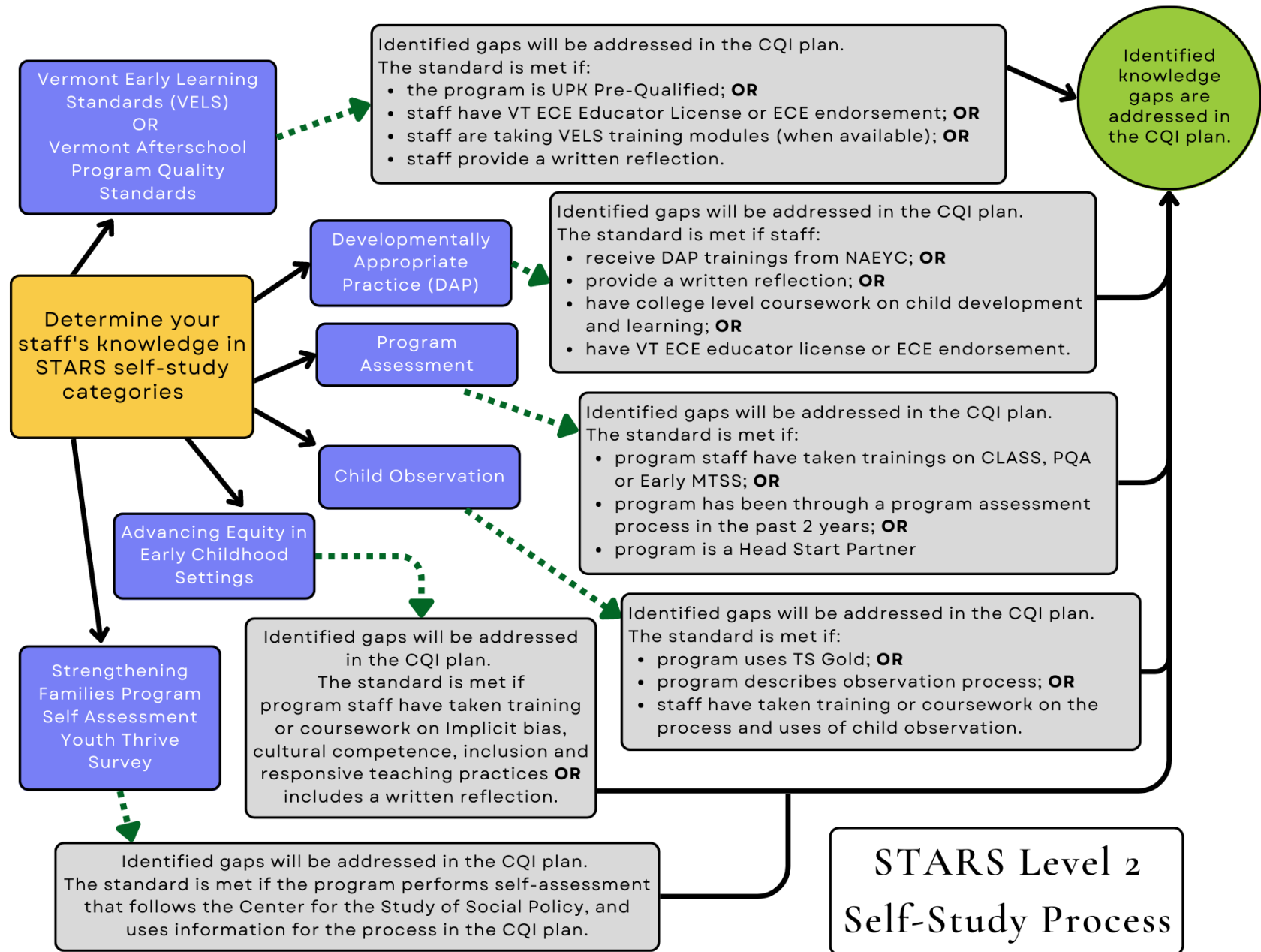
PQA is the STARS assessment for afterschool programs. SAPQA (School Age Program Quality Assessment) is used for programs serving children grades K-6. YPQA (Youth Program Quality Assessment) is used for programs serving children grades 4-12. SELPQA (Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment) is the social emotional learning tool used for K-12 programs.

For programs that serve a combination of age groups that include more than five school age children, both CLASS and PQA assessments should be conducted.

\*PQA and CLASS assessments will be provided by the SPARQS team.

#### **TPOT (Teaching Practice Observation Tool)**

TPOT is the assessment for UPK and UPK partner programs which are also Early MTSS implementation sites, as designated by the AOE, and which are implementing the Pyramid Model using the TPOT as part of the process.



A graphic representing how programs may identify staff knowledge gaps in STARS self-study categories and address them in their CQI Plan.

Before you submit your STARS CQI Plan and plan evidence for STARS Level 2, please review the following STARS Level 2 Standards checklist and STARS Level 2 Evidence Chart to confirm you have the required documents. To show that your CQI plan meets the standards, one or two pieces of evidence for each are required and additional evidence may be included. Standards fall under one of three STARS Elements of Quality: **Adult Child Interactions**, **Family & Youth Engagement**, and **Responsive Practice**.

| Element of Quality        | STARS Level 2 Standards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Evidence 1               | Evidence 2               |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                           | The program demonstrates it is licensed in good standing with VT Child Care Licensing regulations. Programs with a license in provisional, intent to suspend, suspended, intent to revoke, or revoked status are not eligible for participation in STARS.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | No evidence required ☒   |                          |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Complete a self-study process for program assessment. Learn about program assessment tools. Choose tool(s) most relevant to ages served and program type. Use information from study as CQI Goals.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Family & Youth Engagement | Self-assess family and youth engagement practices using Strengthening Families Self-Assessment or Youth Thrive Survey. Use the information to establish CQI Goals. NAFCC accredited programs meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Responsive Practice       | <p>Demonstrate staff are knowledgeable in the following STARS self-study categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmentally Appropriate Practice</li> <li>• Vermont Early Learning Standards Birth Through Third Grade (includes school age)</li> <li>• Age-appropriate child observation and documentation techniques</li> <li>• Cultural competency and awareness about power, privilege, and equity issues that affect children, youth, families, and staff.</li> </ul> <p>Address required knowledge gaps with a plan and a timeline for achieving training goals.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**What evidence should my program use to demonstrate it meets the STARS standards?** The following chart includes suggestions for evidence that programs may submit to demonstrate they have met the standards in STARS Level 2. Programs may identify other forms of evidence that also support their CQI work. You must redact Personally Identifying Information (PII) and Personal Health Information (PHI) in all evidence documents.

| STARS Level 2 Evidence Chart                               |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evidence (suggested types of evidence to support CQI Plan) | <b>Adult-Child Interactions Standard</b><br>Complete a self-study process for program assessment. Learn about program assessment tools. | <b>Family &amp; Youth Engagement Standard</b><br>Self-assess family and youth engagement practices using Strengthening Families Self-Assessment or Youth Thrive Survey. | <b>Responsive Practice Standard</b><br>Demonstrate staff are knowledgeable in STARS self-study categories. |
| Quality Credential Report                                  | ✓                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                         | ✓                                                                                                          |
| Competed Form                                              | ✓                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                            |
| Written Reflection                                         | ✓                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                         | ✓                                                                                                          |
| Observation Record                                         | ✓                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                          |
| Communication Example                                      |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                            |
| Survey Result                                              | ✓                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                            |
| Learning Activity Plan                                     |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                         | ✓                                                                                                          |
| Coaching Report                                            |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                         | ✓                                                                                                          |
| Workgroups                                                 |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                         | ✓                                                                                                          |

## STARS Level 3 and Early Implementation

At STARS Level 3, you and your program staff have engaged in self-study of external program assessments and family and youth engagement practices. You and your program staff have knowledge of VELs, DAP, child observation and documentation techniques, and training in cultural competency and awareness.

At this level, STARS standards focus on implementing improvements identified in Level 2 and continuing to assess program strategies and practices. The Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive surveys and child observations and youth voice continue to be the STARS tools to assess program strengths and areas for improvement. Level 3 programs also receive external consultation from a STARS approved observer via SPARQS using the state-approved assessment tools most relevant to your program type and the ages of children you serve.

## Provisional STARS Level 3 Designation Policy and Procedure

Provisional STARS Level 3 status may be granted to new programs that wish to offer UPK services at start-up. This status will be assigned only for eligible programs. To be eligible a program must:

- Be newly licensed to operate an early childhood or afterschool program (within the last 60 days) or have an application for licensure that is pending.
- Be requesting provisional 3 STARS to apply for UPK Pre-Qualification.

### Procedure

1. Programs seeking Provisional STARS Level 3 status email the STARS Team at [STARS@vermont.gov](mailto:STARS@vermont.gov).
2. A STARS administrator determines program eligibility.
3. The program receives priority access to SPARQS for CQI plan development and progress monitoring to reach implementation.
4. The program submits a STARS Level 3 CQI Plan with available evidence.
5. Program submits a six-month updated CQI plan with evidence showing significant progress toward implementing STARS Level 3 standards.
6. Program meets STARS Level 3 or higher standards within one year of being assigned Provisional STARS Level 3 status.
7. Provisional STARS Level 3 status cannot be renewed.

Before you submit your STARS CQI Plan and plan evidence for STARS Level 3, please review the following STARS Level 3 Standards checklist and STARS Level 3 Evidence Chart to confirm you have the required documents. To show that your CQI plan meets the standards, one or two pieces of evidence for each are required and additional evidence may be included. Standards fall under one of three STARS Elements of Quality: **Adult Child Interactions**, **Family & Youth Engagement**, and **Responsive Practice**.

| Element of Quality        | STARS Level 3 Standards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Evidence 1                              | Evidence 2               |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------|
|                           | The program completed level 2 or can provide evidence that meets level 2 standards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | See Level 2<br><input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Receive consultation from a STARS approved observer using the state-approved assessment tools most relevant to the ages and program type. Develop and implement goals for improvements to adult-child interactions using assessment feedback as a reference. NAFCC accredited programs meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/>                |                          |
| Family & Youth Engagement | Implement goals from the STARS Level 2 CQI plan based on the Strengthening Families and/or Youth Thrive Survey that increase family or youth engagement in the program. Use self-assessment feedback as a reference. Name resources, implementation strategies, and measures that determine success.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/>                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Develop and implement new goals for improvements to adult-child interactions using assessment feedback as a reference. Name resources, implementation strategies, and measures that determine success. NAFCC accredited programs meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/>                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Responsive Practice       | <p>Conduct child observations or use child voice on a regular basis, record observations and use them for learning activity planning purposes. In groups with more than one staff, observation and planning will involve team members.</p> <p>Learning activity planning will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include information from child observation and input.</li> <li>• Consider the needs and interests of each and every child.</li> </ul> <p>Use observations to determine child interests and needs and to set CQI Plan improvement goals. Use information from observations to plan learning activities. Build on goals and information collected from Level 2 CQI Plan (if Level 2 CQI Plan was completed) NAFCC accreditation meets this standard.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/>                | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**What evidence should my program use to demonstrate it meets the STARS standards?** The following chart includes suggestions for evidence that programs may submit to demonstrate they have met the standards in STARS Level 3. Programs may identify other forms of evidence that also support their CQI work. You must redact Personally Identifying Information (PII) and Personal Health Information (PHI) in all evidence documents.

| STARS Level 3 Evidence Chart                               |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evidence (suggested types of evidence to support CQI Plan) | <b>Adult-Child Interactions Standard</b><br>Receive consultation from a STARS approved observer using the state-approved assessment tools most relevant to the ages and program type. | <b>Family &amp; Youth Engagement Standard</b><br>Implement goals from the STARS Level 2 CQI plan based on the Strengthening Families and/or Youth Thrive Survey that increase family or youth engagement in the program. | <b>Adult-Child Interactions Standard</b><br>Develop and implement new goals for improvements using assessment feedback as a reference. Name resources, implementation strategies and measures that determine success. | <b>Responsive Practice Standard</b><br>Conduct child observations or use child voice on a regular basis, record observations and use them for learning activity planning purposes. |
| Competed Form                                              | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Written Reflection                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Observation Record                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Communication Example                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Survey Result                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Learning Activity Plan                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Coaching Report                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Workgroups                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                    |

## STARS Level 4 and Improved Implementation

At STARS Level 4, your program receives a *scored or rated* external assessment from a STARS approved observer via SPARQS and achieves results at least in the middle range as defined by the authors of the tool used (CLASS or PQA).

At this level, your program meets STARS standards that focus on implementing improvements identified in Level 3 and continues to assess program strategies and practices. Your program's structure addresses at least three Family Protective Factors or Youth Thrive Protective Factors (as defined by the Center for the Study of Social Policy) and your program measures its effectiveness in strengthening families and engaging youth voice. The Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive surveys and child observations and youth voice continue to be the STARS tool to assess program strengths and areas for improvement. You and your program staff are familiar with processes for child assessment and child screening using state approved tools such as TS Gold, ASQ, Work Sampling and High Scope.

Before you submit your STARS CQI Plan and plan evidence for STARS Level 4, please review the following STARS Level 4 Standards checklist and STARS Level 4 Evidence Chart to confirm you have the required documents. To show that your CQI plan meets the standards, one or two pieces of evidence for each are required and additional evidence may be included. Standards fall under one of three STARS Elements of Quality: **Adult Child Interactions**, **Family & Youth Engagement**, and **Responsive Practice**.

| Element of Quality        | STARS Level 4 Standards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Evidence 1                              | Evidence 2               |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------|
|                           | Continue to meet all Level 3 standards.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | See Level 3<br><input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Each classroom or group receives a program assessment by a SPARQS assessor, or pyramid model coach using CLASS, PQA, or TPOT. The assessment is scored or rated, and the results are in the middle range. CQI Plan shows that the program assesses for quality improvement and demonstrates goals are reviewed and revised based on data. MTSS*, Head Start and Early Head Start partner programs automatically meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/>                |                          |
| Family & Youth Engagement | Add and measure effectiveness of programmatic structures that strengthen families and engage youth voice. Program structures should address at least 3 Family Protective Factors or Youth Thrive Protective Factors as described by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. CQI Plan builds on goals and information from Level 3, creates new goals to improve family and youth engagement, and tests goal outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <input type="checkbox"/>                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Be familiar with processes for child assessment and child screening using state approved tools such as TS Gold, ASQ, Work Sampling and High Scope. CQI Plan addresses required training gaps and a timeline for achieving training goals. MTSS*, Head Start and Early Head Start partner programs automatically meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/>                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Responsive Practice       | <p>Conduct child observations or use child voice on a regular basis, record observations and use them for learning activity planning purposes. Learning activity planning will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include information from child observation and input.</li> <li>• Consider the needs and interests of each and every child.</li> <li>• Be developmentally appropriate</li> <li>• Align with VELs, Vermont Early Learning Standards</li> </ul> <p>CQI Plan tracks learning activities and sets improvement goals for implementing DAP, child interests and needs, and shows how they align with VELs or Vermont Afterschool Program Standards. CQI Plan builds on goals and information collected from Level 3 CQI Plan, (if level 3 CQI plan was completed).</p> <p>MTSS* programs may automatically meet this standard.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/>                | <input type="checkbox"/> |

\*Programs implementing Early MTSS for less than one year meet STARS Level 4 Adult-Child Interactions and Responsive Practice standards and for more than one year meet STARS Level 5 Adult-Child Interactions and Responsive Practice standards.

**What evidence should my program use to demonstrate it meets the STARS standards?** The following chart includes suggestions for evidence that programs may submit to demonstrate they have met the standards in STARS Level 4. Programs may identify other forms of evidence that also support their CQI work. You must redact Personally Identifying Information (PII) and Personal Health Information (PHI) in all evidence documents.

| STARS Level 4 Evidence Chart                               |                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evidence (suggested types of evidence to support CQI Plan) | <b>Adult-Child Interactions Standard</b><br><br>Each classroom or group receives a program assessment by a SPARQS assessor, or pyramid model coach using CLASS, PQA, TPOT. | <b>Family &amp; Youth Engagement Standard</b><br><br>Add and measure effectiveness of programmatic structures that strengthen families and engage youth voice. | <b>Adult-Child Interactions Standard</b><br><br>Be familiar with processes for child assessment and child screening using state approved tools such as TS Gold, ASQ, Work Sampling and High Scope. | <b>Responsive Practice Standard</b><br><br>Conduct child observations or use child voice on a regular basis, record observations and use them for learning activity planning. |
| Competed Form                                              | ✓                                                                                                                                                                          | ✓                                                                                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Written Reflection                                         |                                                                                                                                                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | ✓                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Observation Record                                         | ✓                                                                                                                                                                          | ✓                                                                                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Communication Example                                      |                                                                                                                                                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Survey Result                                              |                                                                                                                                                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Learning Activity Plan                                     |                                                                                                                                                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | ✓                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Coaching Report                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                                          | ✓                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | ✓                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Workgroups                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                            | ✓                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | ✓                                                                                                                                                                             |

## STARS Level 5 and Full Implementation

**NAEYC and Head Start accredited programs** automatically meet Level 5 STARS Standards. If your program is not nationally accredited, it receives a *scored or rated* assessment from a STARS approved observer via SPARQS and achieves results in the high range as defined by the authors of the tool used (CLASS or PQA).

At this level, your program meets STARS standards that focus on implementing improvements identified in Level 4 and continues to assess program strategies and practices. Your program's structure addresses at least three Family Protective Factors or Youth Thrive Protective Factors (as defined by the Center for the Study of Social Policy) and your program measures its effectiveness in strengthening families and engaging youth voice. The Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive surveys and child observations and youth voice continue to be the STARS tool to assess program strengths and areas for improvement. You and your program staff are familiar with processes for child assessment and child screening using state approved tools such as TS Gold, ASQ, Work Sampling and High Scope.

Before you submit your STARS CQI Plan and plan evidence for STARS Level 5, please review the following STARS Level 5 Standards checklist and STARS Level 5 Evidence Chart to confirm you have the required documents. To show that your CQI plan meets the standards, one or two pieces of evidence for each are required and additional evidence may be included. Standards fall under one of three STARS Elements of Quality: **Adult Child Interactions**, **Family & Youth Engagement**, and **Responsive Practice**.

| Element of Quality        | STARS Level 5 Standards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Evidence 1               | Evidence 2               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                           | Continue to meet all Level 4 standards.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
|                           | NAEYC and Head Start accredited programs meet Level 5 STARS Standards.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Address strategies to maintain elevated levels in CQI plan. Each classroom or group receives a program assessment by a SPARQS assessor or pyramid model coach using CLASS, PQA, or TPOT. The assessment is scored or rated, with results in the high range. EMTSS sites demonstrate full implementation. CQI Plan assesses for quality improvements and demonstrates that goals are reviewed and revised based on data. Early MTSS*, Head Start and Early Head Start partner programs meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| Family & Youth Engagement | Provide supports to strengthen families specifying at least three protective factors for families and youth from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (SSP) Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive framework. Families/youth participate in program leadership. CQI Plan includes goals to engage family or youth leaders and tracks success.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adult-Child Interactions  | Be familiar with processes for child assessment and child screening using state approved tools such as TS Gold, ASQ, Work Sampling and High Scope. CQI Plan addresses required training gaps and a timeline for achieving training goals. Early MTSS*, Head Start and Early Head Start partner programs meet this standard.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Responsive Practice       | <p>Conduct child observations or use child voice on a regular basis, record observations and use them for learning activity planning. When more than one adult regularly interacts with a group of children, observation and planning will involve team members.</p> <p>Learning Activity Planning will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include information from child observation and input.</li> <li>• Consider the needs and interests of each and every child.</li> <li>• Be developmentally appropriate.</li> <li>• Incorporate VELs or Vermont Afterschool Program Standards</li> <li>• Be responsive to the child's family culture, race and ethnicity, gender identity, and language.</li> </ul> <p>CQI Plan bases strategies to maintain high level adult-child interactions on assessment observations and feedback and addresses strategies for maintaining elevated level responsive and equitable practices. CQI Plan tracks and develops goals designed to ensure continuity of high-level responsive practice. Programs fully implementing Early MTSS* meet this standard.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**What evidence should my program use to demonstrate it meets the STARS standards?** The following chart includes suggestions for evidence that programs may submit to demonstrate they have met the standards in STARS Level 5. Programs may identify other forms of evidence that also support their CQI work. You must redact Personally Identifying Information (PII) and Personal Health Information (PHI) in all evidence documents.

| STARS Level 5 Evidence Chart                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evidence<br>(suggested types of<br>evidence to support<br>CQI Plan) | <b>Adult-Child Interactions<br/>Standard</b><br><br>Address strategies to<br>maintain elevated levels in<br>CQI plan. Each classroom<br>or group receives a scored<br>program assessment<br>using CLASS, PQA, or<br>TPOT with high results. | <b>Family &amp; Youth<br/>Engagement Standard</b><br><br>Provide supports to<br>strengthen families<br>specifying at least three<br>protective factors for families<br>and youth from the<br>Strengthening Families and<br>Youth Thrive framework. | <b>Adult-Child Interactions<br/>Standard</b><br><br>Be familiar with processes<br>for child assessment and<br>child screening using state<br>approved tools such as TS<br>Gold, ASQ, Work Sampling<br>and High Scope. | <b>Responsive Practice<br/>Standard</b><br><br>Conduct child<br>observations or use child<br>voice regularly, record<br>observations and use<br>them for learning activity<br>planning purposes.<br>Activities include DAP. |
| Competed Form                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Written Reflection                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Observation Record                                                  | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Communication<br>Example                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Survey Result                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Learning Activity<br>Plan                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Coaching Report                                                     | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Workgroups                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

## STARS Application Process

### STARS Portfolio

You build and submit your program's application for a STARS level in the form of an **online STARS Portfolio**. A **portfolio** is a selection of a program's work (such as program assessment reports, child observation samples, and learning planning activities) compiled over a period of time and used for assessing performance or progress. Your STARS Portfolio must include 1) a CQI Plan for the STARS level your program is applying for; and 2) required evidence demonstrating your program meets the standards for that STARS level.

We recommend that you consult this manual and review the STARS Level Standards and Evidence charts before preparing your STARS Portfolio. After reading the information, you may find that you have already met some criteria and have evidence completed.

Click this link to access the online [STARS CQI Application](#). You can begin preparing your STARS CQI Application using this [CQI Plan template](#) by filling in and attaching the required information. Refer to this guidance manual for any questions, or please contact the CDD STARS Team at [STARS@vermont.gov](mailto:STARS@vermont.gov) or 800-649-2642, option 8.

When you submit your portfolio:

- Maintain a complete copy of your portfolio and attachments that are accessible to program staff. Once submitted, STARS may not be able to retrieve and return documents you submitted.
- The STARS Team notifies you via email that it has received your portfolio.
- The STARS Team reviews your portfolio in the order it is received and within 2 weeks of receipt date.
- Once STARS reviews the portfolio, you are notified of the results of the review.
- If the STARS Team approves your program's portfolio, they send you an email with the start date of the new certificate.
- Incomplete portfolios are kept for up to 90 days to allow the program to submit missing information. CDD will send periodic reminders requesting the missing information.
- The STARS Team enters your STARS level renewals or any change in STARS level into your profile quality tab in BFIS.
- When a program achieves a higher STARS level for the first time the program is eligible for a bonus.

In general, you may apply for STARS levels 3, 4, or 5 without applying for the level(s) below but must show evidence of having met the criteria for those levels. Your STARS Portfolio does not need to include CQI Plans for previous levels.

### **Assessment Tools for STARS**

**CLASS** stands for Classroom Assessment Scoring System, copyrighted, and published by [Teachstone](#). Family Child Care, Center Based Early Childhood, UPK and UPK partner programs will use CLASS Infant, Toddler and CLASS-2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup>.

**TPOT and TPITOS** stand for Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool and Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale. These tools are copyrighted and published by Brookes Publishing Company and are used for programs identified by the Agency of Education as Early Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (EMTSS) implementation sites.

**PQA** Program Quality Assessment

**YPQA** Youth Program Quality Assessment

**SAPQA** School Age Program Quality Assessment

**SELPQA** Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment

These assessments are available on the [Forum for Youth Investment](#) website. To note, there are other more targeted assessments available on this website that you may use in your CQI process.

You may use these assessments in Afterschool Programs, or programs that serve multiple ages with more than five school age children.

**Strengthening Families Program Self- Assessment**

**Youth Thrive Survey**

These assessment tools are available from the [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#) website. This website also contains toolkits, articles, reports, and other resources for programs that do not have an associated cost.

### **Streamlined Application Eligibility**

NAEYC accredited or Head Start programs for which Head Start is the administrator and licensee are automatically eligible for STARS level 5.

Head Start and Early Head Start partner programs automatically meet the standards for Adult-Child Interactions at STARS levels 4 and 5.

Programs implementing Early MTSS for less than one year meet the standards for STARS Level 4 in Adult-Child Interactions and Responsive Practice and for more than one year meet the standards for STARS Level 5 in Adult-Child Interactions and Responsive Practice.

NAFCC accredited programs meet the following standards: Adult-Child Interactions, STARS level 3; Family Engagement, STARS level 2; and Responsive Practices, STARS level 3.

### **STARS Certificates**

When CDD approves your STARS portfolio your program, it awards a STARS level certificate with a start and end date. STARS certificates are valid for three years from the date of issue. Should your program's STARS level change during this three-year period, a new certificate will be issued, but the original end date of the certificate will remain the same. You may submit updates to your program's portfolio may at any time in the three-year period to increase a STARS level.

### **Annual Reporting**

CDD requires your program to submit an annual report in the years when your program does not have a full STARS application due (years 2 and 3 of the 3-year cycle). The annual report is an update to your program's CQI Plan, briefly outlining progress toward goals and is due on your program's STARS certificate anniversary date. During the STARS

revision pilot year (July 2023 – June 2024), programs may not have yet fully developed a CQI Plan. In these cases, the annual update must include:

- Confirmation that all program staff have viewed or participated in two training sessions: **STARS--An Overview of the New Model** and **STARS CQI Plan--An Introduction** (registration links to and recordings of these trainings are located on the [STARS website](#)), and
- A rough draft of your program's CQI Plan.

### **Renewing or updating STARS status**

To maintain your program's STARS level, you must update your STARS status annually and renew your STARS status every 3 years. Updating a STARS status requires submitting a brief annual update of the CQI plan. Renewing a STARS status requires submitting the full portfolio with all information updated.

### **Update and renewal reminders**

As a participating program, CDD will email you a reminder approximately 2 months before the due date of your STARS application or annual report. If the STARS Team does not receive an application or annual report by the due date, CDD will send a series of reminder emails until 90 days past the due date. In some instances, CDD may also follow up with a phone call. If after 90 days the STARS Team receives no additional information for renewal applications, the STARS portfolio reviewer may deem the process complete and award the STARS level earned with the information originally provided. If STARS does not receive an updated CQI Plan within 90 days of the due date, it assigns your program a STARS level 1. The STARS Team notifies your program of STARS status changes and notes the change in BFIS. Your program may reapply to increase to a new STARS level at any time.

Even though the STARS Team provides reminders of STARS due dates, it remains the responsibility of the program to be aware of due dates and to submit updates and renewals on time.

## **Early Updates**

If your program chooses to apply to increase its STARS level before its STARS certificate expires, CDD considers your application an early update and you are not required to complete a full application. In such cases, your program only needs to send additional information specific to the STARS level increase intended. If your program is awarded a STARS level change because of the early update, the end date of the new status will be the same end date assigned at the beginning of the 3-year renewal cycle. For example: a program with certificate dates 4/10/2022 through 4/9/2025 submits an early update and increases its STARS level effective 4/23/2023. The new certificate will have a start date of 4/23/2023 and will have an end date of 4/9/2025.

## **Program Organization Changes and STARS Level Transfers**

If your program receives a new license number because of a move to a new location or as a result of a change in program type, such as changing from a registered home to a licensed family child care program, the STAR rating will be transferred to the new number.

If your program is sold to a new owner or organization, the STARS level under the previous owner will be transferred for 90 days. At the end of the 90-day period, the new program leader must submit a STARS portfolio reflecting those changes.

If an organization expands and opens new programs under the same administration, each new program must apply individually to STARS. Each program must have its own CQI plan with evidence that is specific to the individual program.

## **Bonuses**

Each time your program achieves a STARS level for the first time, you are eligible for a bonus payment. A program that has achieved a STARS level, decreased in STARS level, or has closed will not receive a bonus for achieving a STARS level a second time. Programs do not currently receive bonuses for maintaining a STARS level.

## Loss of License in Good Standing

If your program's license status is changed to Provisional, Intent to Revoke, Intent to Suspend, Revoked or Suspended, it is no longer eligible for a STARS level and the tier level in BFIS will be changed to Not Rated. If your program regains its licensed status, the tier level will be changed to STARS level 1. Your program may then reapply to achieve a higher STARS level. A bonus will only be paid if the program achieves a higher STARS level than it previously earned.

## STARS Advisory Group

An advisory group monitors and enhances STARS. The mission of the STARS Advisory Group is to provide stakeholder input on the system policies and practices to continuously improve equitable access and system functions.

Vision: An accessible and well-functioning Quality Recognition and Improvement System informed by stakeholders will improve outcomes for children, family engagement and youth voice.

The STARS advisory group is comprised of experts from the field of early childhood and afterschool across all settings. The group provides advice and recommendations to CDD regarding access, system functions, and its impact on quality.

It will:

- Provide knowledge and perspective to the CDD on issues related to STARS.
- Provide input to a CQI plan for the STARS system administrator.
- Make recommendations for updates to STARS standards, practices, or policies.

Meetings will be open and available to the public.

## STARS Templates and Examples

- [CQI Plan Goal Examples](#)
- [Child Observation Example Questions](#) and [Child Observation Template](#)
- [Learning Activity Planning Template \(AOE\)](#)
- [Learning Activity Planning Template \(STARS CQI\)](#)

- [CQI Plan Template](#)
- [Example CQI Plan](#)

## Definitions of Terms Used in STARS

For reference: Program Type(s):

**AS = Afterschool Programs**

**CBCCPP = Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs**

**PP = Public Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

**FCCH = Family Child Care Home**

**Adult-Child Interactions:** Mutual or reciprocal action or influence between an adult and child. This reciprocal action is characterized by communication as adults and children work or spend time together. Nurturing, supportive, and reciprocal adult- child interactions are foundational to the learning process.

**Afterschool Program:** A program licensed by the Division whose services are designed to provide school age children (see definition of School Age Child) with developmentally appropriate experiences before school, after school, and during school vacations.

**Align:** Bring into coordination, relation, or agreement with the policy or standard.

**Bright Futures Information System:** The web-based information and management system used by the Vermont Division for Children and Families, Child Development Division to communicate with childcare and education providers and parents. It manages processes, actions, documents, and information related to childcare and early education licensing; the qualifications and professional development experiences of early childhood and afterschool professionals; and Child Care Financial Assistance Program and other payments.

**BFIS Quality Credential Account.** If you work in a regulated childcare program, you are required to use a BFIS *Quality and Credential Account*. It is your online space to track information about your career including:

- Work experience

- Completed degrees and coursework.
- Education in process
- Certificates and credentials
- Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP)
- Training/workshop attendance
- Copies of transcripts, resumes, and educator licenses

**Center Based Child Care and Preschool Program (CBCCPP):** the program and facility approved to provide developmentally appropriate care, education, protection, and supervision designed to ensure wholesome growth and educational experiences for children outside of their home for periods of less than twenty-four (24) hours per day. A CBCCPP license is specific to a physical location where services are provided.

**Child:** A person who is at least six (6) weeks old and has not reached the age of thirteen (13) years.

**Child assessment:** Child assessment is using benchmarks for learning or skills to provide instruction for areas that have been identified for improvement. Teaching Strategies Gold is an example of a child assessment tool.

**Child observation:** Attending closely to a child's activity and behavior in order to collect information about the child's strengths and interests.

**Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI):** The concept of making steady, intentional changes to program practices with the goal of improving overall program operation and practices to increase positive outcomes for children. Typically, the continuous improvement process employs a steady stream of small changes.

**Culturally responsive:** Cultural responsiveness is an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn about and interact with understanding of the varying cultural and community norms of children and their families. Culturally responsive teaching and caregiving bridges gaps in communication and understanding so that supportive interactions between children, program staff, and families can occur.

**Curriculum:** The curriculum consists of plans for the learning experiences through which children acquire knowledge, skills, abilities, and understanding. The curriculum includes learning goals and objectives, activities, steps related to preparation, and materials needed.

**Data:** Information, especially facts or numbers, collected to be examined and considered and used to help with making decisions

**Developmentally Appropriate:** Practices grounded in research on how young children develop and learn. It means providing activities and interactions suitable to children's age and developmental status, as individuals and as a group, and providing support for each child in attaining challenging yet achievable goals that contribute to his/her unique, ongoing development and learning. Such practice is responsive to the social and cultural contexts in which children live.

**Developmental Screening:** A screening used to determine if a child is meeting developmental milestones like rolling over, walking, or talking or if there might be a reason to refer the child for special services, such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).

**Each and every child:** Wording used in the Vermont Early Education Guiding Principles which highlights how we value individual children; their interests, needs and influences on their development. \

**Element of Quality:** In the STARS system, element of quality refers to a defined domain of knowledge and skill in the field of early childhood and afterschool programs.

**Equitable and responsive practice:** Understanding and valuing the experiences and perspectives of children and their families in order to form relationships, remove barriers to access, and support success in the program.

**Evidence:** Information in the form of documents, records, or artifacts that support the validity of knowledge and practices reported as part of the STARS application and CQI plan.

**Family:** A socially recognized group of two or more individuals joined by kinship (adoption, blood, social agreements such as friendship, or marriage).

**Family Child Care Provider:** Family Child Care Provider (FCCP) is the CDD-approved person who operates a registered or licensed FCCH, is responsible for the operation of that FCCH and considered legally responsible for compliance with licensing regulations. The FCCP approves or develops the FCCH's program and curriculum and supervises staff.

**Family engagement:** Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.

**Family voice:** Families have a long-term, ongoing relationship with their child(ren) and family preferences should be included in programming decisions for their child.

**Individually responsive:** Teaching strategies that are specific to individual children's interests, needs, and developmental level.

**Group:** The number of children:

- who meet together regularly.
- can be identified with one another as being distinct from the larger population of children present.
- are assigned to a consistent staff member or team of staff members.

**IPDP:** An Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) is a personalized plan for increasing one's knowledge and improving skills in the field of early childhood and afterschool or afterschool services. It includes assessing current knowledge and skills in each of the core knowledge areas required to work in the field; identifying areas for growth and learning; stating specific measurable professional goals based on these areas of growth, with related strategies, resources, and a timeline to meet each goal.

**Linguistically responsive:** Teaching practices that support the learning, development, and engagement of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It includes supports for continued development of children's home or tribal languages by authentically incorporating children's languages into the learning environment.

**Northern Lights at CCV (or Northern Lights):** The hub of Vermont's professional development system for the early childhood and afterschool workforce.

**Observation:** The act of noticing, perceiving, or attending to something in order to determine its significance. In early childhood and afterschool programs, observations of children, adults, or both determine interests, needs, and developmental progress in order to plan engaging activities, provide basis for reflective practice for teachers, and for use in child assessment.

**Observation Record:** Method of recording observation for the purposes of determining child interests and strengths. There are many ways to perform targeted observations and many ways to record observations, including but not limited to note taking, photos, video, and audio recordings.

**Personally Identifiable Information (PII):** Information, such as name, social security number, mailing or email address, when used alone or combined with other data points, can be used to reasonably identify an individual person.

**Practices:** The ways in which staff understand and implement programming and learning activities. Practices reflect beliefs and ethics about the teaching and learning process.

**Protected Health Information (PHI):** Information created, used, or disclosed in the course of providing a health care service such as diagnosis or treatment, and when used alone or combined with other data points, can be used to reasonably identify an individual person.

**Portfolio:** A selection of a program's work compiled over a period of time and used for assessing performance and progress. For STARS, the application will be in a portfolio format with evidence that verifies the CQI plan goals and activities populating the portfolio.

**Pre-K Partner program:** A privately owned program, approved to provide Universal Pre-K programming through Act 166 at no cost to families.

**Professional Development:** Learning and supporting activities, designed in accordance with adult learning principles that prepare and enhance individuals in their work with children and their families and lead to improvements in practitioner knowledge, skills, and practices.

**Program:** All activities related to the provision of childcare and education.

**Program Assessment:** A process using observation and a program assessment tool in order to determine program strengths, opportunities for growth, and progress toward identified goals.

**Program Director:** The staff member who is directly responsible for the program's daily operations and services to children and their families, for the development or approval of the program and curriculum, and for supervision of staff and volunteers.

**Program Leader:** The person primarily responsible for the management, oversight, and implementation of a care and learning program for children and youth.

**Public School Operated Pre-Kindergarten Program:** A Universal Pre-K program provided in a public school setting.

**QRIS:** Quality Recognition and Improvement Systems (QRIS) recognize early childhood and afterschool program strengths, support family choice, and improve children's experiences in early childhood and afterschool programs. QRIS support programs in fostering healthy development and preparing young children for future learning and life success.

**Responsive Practice:** Teaching strategies that are specific to individual children and youth's interests, needs, and developmental level, family culture, language, racial and ethnic diversity, and gender identity. Responsive practice requires awareness of one's own views about difference, and the ability to understand the varying cultural and community norms of children and their families. Responsive teaching and caregiving bridges gaps in communication and understanding so that supportive interactions between children, youth, program staff, and families can occur.

**School Age Child:** A child who is five (5) years of age or older and currently attends kindergarten or has completed kindergarten or a higher grade.

**Self-assessment:** The process by which a program or staff person monitors and evaluates the quality of their own teacher-child interactions, or family engagement to identify strategies that improve their understanding and skills.

**Staff:** For Afterschool Programs- Persons who have direct responsibilities for the program's operation and the health, safety, education, and well-being of children, including Afterschool Administrator, Site Director, Program Staff, and Afterschool Aides counted in the staff/child ratio.

For Center Based Early Care and Education Programs- All persons employed by the CBCCPP as a program director, teacher, teacher associate, teacher assistant, trainee, or classroom aide. If a licensee (such as Head Start) has a contractual relationship with another entity (such as a school supervisory union) to provide an individual to the licensee to serve as staff within the licensee's CBCCPP and who will not be employed by the licensee, these individuals may be defined as staff and shall have all CBCCPP regulations pertaining to staff apply. The CBCCPP maintains documentation of this contractual relationship.

For Home Based Care and Education -All persons employed by the FCCH as a Family Child Care Provider, Family Child Care Assistant, classroom aide, or trainee.

For the purposes of STARS, this definition does not include substitutes and seasonal staff.

**Standard:** Used as measure in comparative evaluation to determine a level of quality or attainment. STARS standards reflect improvement in the content areas and levels of the system.

**State-approved:** Any resource such as a program assessment tool approved by the Child Development Division as a measure to determine a program has met a standard.

**Workgroup:** Workgroups are a multi-session, facilitated conversation among members of a particular group with a goal of creating positive change related to an area of common interest.

Workgroups explore a topic or area of shared inquiry. Members of a workgroup decide what areas of the topic they wish to explore. Facilitators help guide the conversation and gather and share resources to support the group's learning.

**Written Reflection:** For the purposes of STARS, A narrative describing the writer's depth of knowledge about a given topic and method for implementing that knowledge in their practice with young children.

**Youth:** A child between the ages of nine and 17.

**Youth Engagement:** Reaching out to youth to ensure youth voice and participation in program planning and reflection on all programmatic aspects.

## STARS Content Area Resources

### Vermont's Guiding Principles

#### Vermont's Guiding Principles

Each and every young child (birth through Grade 3) and family in Vermont has diverse strengths rooted in their unique culture, heritage, language, beliefs, and circumstances. They have gifts and abilities that should be celebrated and nurtured. Full participation means promoting a sense of belonging, supporting positive social relationships, and enabling families and early childhood professionals to gain the competence and confidence to positively impact the lives of each and every child and their family.

The Guiding Principles describe what individuals, organizations, and communities understand and do to realize the promise of each and every young Vermont child. They highlight explicit, intentional, and strengths-based practices that are respectful of and responsive to child, family, and community values, priorities, and beliefs. They are consistent with relevant state and national laws and policies. These principles articulate Vermont's commitment to fully include each and every child and their family in a continuum of meaningful experiences to ensure their health, mental health, safety, happiness, and success now and into the future.

We believe that each and every child...

Learns within the context of secure and authentic relationships, play, and interactions within their environments.

Deserves equitable access to experiences that acknowledge and build on their uniqueness.

Deserves opportunities to deeply learn and develop to their full potential through joyful interactions in safe, accepting environments.

For each and every family, we will...

Respect and support them as experts, partners, and decision makers in the learning and development of their children.

Pledge to be open, genuine, reflective, and respectful listeners and communication partners.

Build caring communities that are accepting of differences and foster a sense of belonging.

For each and every child and their family, we will...

Promote understanding of the importance of inclusive and effective early childhood experiences.

Build equitable access to opportunities, supports, and services.

Acknowledge and address biases in ourselves and others and the importance of differences such as race, class, gender, family structure, ability, and sexual orientation.

## Professional Development Resources

- [Vermont Early Learning Standards | Agency of Education](#)
- [Training Calendar - Northern Lights at CCV \(northernlightscv.org\)](#)
- [Approved Training Organizations - Northern Lights at CCV \(northernlightscv.org\)](#)
- [Home Page | Early Learning Standards \(vermont.gov\)](#)
- [S.E.E.D. Certification for Teachers \(seedandsew.org\)](#)
- [PYRAMID 802 PLUS](#)
- [The Pyramid Model Consortium - Supporting Early Childhood PBIS](#)
- [Professional Development | NAEYC](#)  
NAEYC Advancing Equity [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement | NAEYC](#)
- [SIMPLE INTERACTIONS - HOME](#)
- [ECTA Center: Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion](#)
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## Currently Approved Program Assessment Tools:

### For All Regulated Early Childhood Programs:

- [CLASS® - Teachstone](#) and [CLASS FAQs](#)

### For All Afterschool Programs.

- [Assessments - The Forum for Youth Investment \(forumfyi.org\)](#)

### For Early-MTSS Implementation Sites

- [Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool \(TPOT™\)](#)
- [Pyramid Model Practice Self-assessment](#)

### For Family and Youth Engagement

- [Strengthening Families© Framework - Center for the Study of Social Policy \(cssp.org\)](#)
- Self-assessment tool for center based child care programs, from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP): [Strengthening Families Self-Assessment for CBCCPPs.](#)
- Self-assessment tool for family child care homes, from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP): [Strengthening Families Self-Assessment for FCCHs](#)
  - State-approved tool for developing an action plan: [Developing an SF Action Plan for Continuous Quality Improvement](#)
  - General information about the [Center for the Study of Social Policy's Self-assessments for Programs](#)
- [Youth Thrive - Center for the Study of Social Policy \(cssp.org\)](#)
- Touchpoints

**Information about accreditation:**

- [Accreditation – National Association for Family Child Care \(nafcc.org\)](#)
- [Accreditation | NAEYC](#)

**Child Observation and Assessment:**

- [Teaching Strategies Gold](#)
- [Work Sampling System | Our Approach to Early Childhood Assessment \(pearsonassessments.com\)](#)

**Child Screening Tools:**

- The ASQ®-3 screening tool for FCCHs and CBCCPPs with enrolled children ages 1 month to 5.5 years: [Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition \(ASQ®-3\)](#)
- The ASQ:SE-2® is a screening tool to assess social-emotional development: <https://agesandstages.com/products-pricing/asqse-2/>

**Additional Assessment Resources:**

- The Dessa Mini screening tool for Afterschool Programs: [Dessa-mini](#)
- Tool to screen, assess, guide intervention planning, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes related to social-emotional competence and resilience of students in grades K-8: <http://www.apperson.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Dessa-Comprehensive-Flyer-FINAL-Update.pdf>
- Help Me Grow is a framework for supporting the development of families and children that includes links to screenings and resources: [www.Helpmegrowvt.org](http://www.Helpmegrowvt.org)
  - [Help Me Grow VT](#): see Developmental Screening tab <https://www.helpmegrowvt.org/my-developing-child>
- [Children's Integrated Services \(CIS\) Guidelines for Recommended Tools](#) provides: 1) common definitions for early identification of developmental delays, risks, or concerns; 2) a list of recommended psychosocial and developmental tools; and 3) a common framework for use of shared tools and language about child development.