Activity 5.2 CQI and Monitoring in Child Care (STARS)

Child Development Division (CDD)

Subgrantee: Vermont Agency for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC)

Our Story

What: We are rebuilding Vermont's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). Our QRIS supports early child education and afterschool programs with a clear path to quality, helps them focus on priorities that link to positive outcomes for children, and develops the habit of continuous quality improvement.

Why: Vermont is committed to supporting quality in child care programs. Vermont was one of the first states to incorporate QRIS, over 20 years ago. We launched STARS (Step Ahead Recognition System) in 2001 to recognize high quality programs with five levels of achievement. Over the years, research and best practices have continued to change the definition of quality. A 2016 impact study by Child Trends revealed that Vermont program quality was not correlated with STARS rating. That same year, Vermont initiated a review of the system including guidance from national experts, current research in best practices, and feedback from Vermont's early childhood education and afterschool programs. That review concluded in fall 2022 with recommendations for change.

Who: CDD worked together with early childhood education stakeholders to revise the system. It built program resources with partners from VTAEYC, Vermont Afterschool (VTA), Let's Grow Kids, and First Children's Finance. STARS is advised by child care providers, members of the Agency of Education, and community partners.

How: CDD removed inequitable STARS incentives linked to the Child Care Financial Assistance Program that were tipped in favor of better-resourced programs and replaced them with incentives that can be accessed by all programs.

CDD and its partners revised STARS to recognize program quality and to be a resource, rather than a measurement. CDD is working with VTAEYC and VTA to provide quality coaching. STARS' revision is based on continuous quality improvement and now all Vermont programs recognized at STSARS level 2 and above are working toward goals that strengthen adult-child interactions, family engagement, and responsive practice. Most importantly, STARS is focused on those three themes (adult-child interactions, family engagement, and responsive practice) because they are proven to impact positive child outcomes.

Vermont programs now assess their progress through tools like CLassroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Program Quality Assessment (PQA). CDD

and its partners are building pathways to more quality-improving resources like the Strengthening Families Framework, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Seed and Sew.

Moral: Systems change is hard. But when a system isn't meeting its purpose, change is necessary. Rebuilding a system that incorporates continuous improvement will not only make change easier, but it will also build a habit of assessment (so change can happen more often than every 20 years)!

Our Resources

STARS Website

SPARQS Website—our subgrantee providing coaching and assessments

SPARQS Overview video

Toddler Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) training by SPARQS

Infant Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) training by SPARQS

PreK Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) training by SPARQS

STARS Newsletter

STARS Training

Our Impacts

The new STARS model launched in summer 2022 and child care and afterschool programs began engaging In July 2023. We are building data to measure our impacts including program CLASS scores and PQA levels, rates of family engagement, programs maintaining or increasing STARS levels, rates for engaging in professional development and coaching, and finally child outcomes (suspension/expulsion rates and graduation rates.

STARS Scorecard

STARS Resource Bundles

Early Childhood Professional Development Bonuses

Afterschool Professional Development Bonuses

STARS Capacity and Incentive Program,