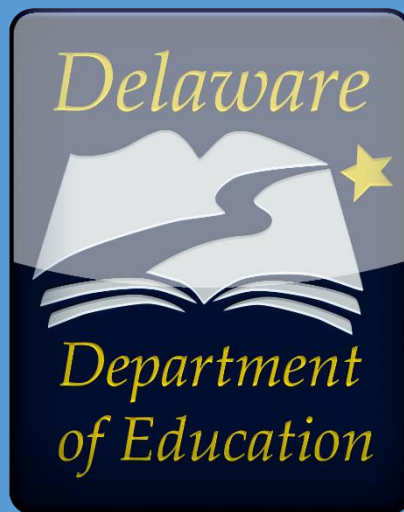


DELAWARE STARS FOR EARLY SUCCESS: REVISION REPORT 2



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Executive Summary

Delaware Stars for Early Success (Stars) is Delaware's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) administered by the Delaware Department of Education. A QRIS is a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education and school-age settings. The goal of Delaware Stars is to invest in participating programs in order to increase access to high-quality care for all of Delaware's children, especially those from low-income families.

Beginning in August 2019, the Delaware Department of Education's (DDOE) Office of Early Learning (OEL) conducted six information sessions throughout Delaware, at which a draft proposal for structural changes to Delaware Stars was shared and discussed. The draft proposal illustrated a hybrid system with building blocks at Star Levels One, Two, and Three, and points at Star Levels Four and Five. Each level emphasizes a different focus. At Star Level One, the focus is Health and Safety. At Star Level Two, the focus is on Leadership and Administration. At Star Level Three, the focus is on Environment. At Star Level Four, the focus is on interactions. At Star Level Five, the focus is on intentional teaching.

Discussion focused on:

- The proposed ordering of the foci
- Items, beyond licensing regulations, that should be verified at Star Level one
- The identification of "leaders" in programs and the supports necessary for that group
- The components of quality environments
- The supports needed for positive interactions and intentional teaching practices

Background

OEL is the state entity that manages Delaware Stars. The Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) at the University of Delaware implements the program and handles day-to-day activities, including providing technical assistance, assessment and verification of Star levels. Delaware Stars has been in existence for more than 10 years, during which time the system has seen periods of rapid change and growth. Like other systems across the country, Delaware Stars has been shown to improve children's executive functioning and moderately increase growth in other domains. However, room for improvement is evident based on research, anecdotal data and the *Evaluation of Delaware Stars for Early Success* report.

The *Evaluation of Delaware Stars for Early Success* report was completed by the RAND Corporation in 2016. The purpose of this evaluation was to support Delaware in its efforts to design and implement an effective, robust system for measuring and reporting on the quality of early learning and care programs in home and center settings. The evaluation further aimed to inform efforts to improve the quality of programs in ways that are beneficial for participating children and their families. The evaluation of Delaware Stars provided independent, objective, and rigorous empirical evidence of the extent to which rating tiers reflect relevant differences in the quality of home- and center-based providers and documented providers' experience with technical assistance, financial supports, and other QRIS features.

OEL contracted with the RAND Corporation to conduct this independent evaluation of Delaware Stars from June 2013 until the report's release in 2016.

Final recommendations based on the RAND evaluation include:

- OEL should look beyond the findings of any one study for its QRIS and discern the broader findings with relevance for QRIS design and implementation
- OEL should consider a streamlined rating system based on carefully selected measures of the dimensions of quality that matter most to Delaware Stars' ultimate goals
- Providers are generally supportive of technical assistance, but there is room for improvement
- There is opportunity for further marketing of Delaware Stars to families with young children
- Improved data management is warranted (Karoly, Schwartz, Setodji, & Hass, 2016).

The Delaware Stars revision process began in December 2017 with the formation of a committee to guide it. The current committee members are:

- Heidi Beck – Executive Director of New Directions Early Head Start, DIEEC
- Cindy Brown – Education Associate (Part B 619 coordinator), OEL
- Martha Buell – Director, DIEEC
- Veronica Commodore – Director of Professional Development, DIEEC
- Caitlin Gleason – Education Associate, OEL
- Rena Hallam – Principal Investigator of Delaware Stars, DIEEC
- Belvie Herbert – Social Service Senior Administrator, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
- Kimberly Krzanowski – Executive Director, OEL
- Lucinda Ross – Executive Director, St. Michael's School and Nursery

- Michelle Shaivitz – Executive Director, Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children
- Kristy Sheffler – Director of Delaware Stars, DIEEC
- Elizabeth G. Timm – Social Services Administrator, Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF)

Information Session Feedback

In order to garner feedback from multiple stakeholders, OEL conducted afternoon and evening information sessions across the state. In all, 210 stakeholders, mostly early learning professionals, attended. Attendees were provided with a graphic (attached) of the draft structure. The draft was presented with the advisory committee's justification for the proposal.

Star Level One: Health and Safety

Keeping children safe and healthy is one of the most important tasks of early childhood educators. Delaware's Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL) sets regulations to ensure this task is accomplished. In this draft structure, being licensed is considered evidence of meeting the requirements for Star Level One. Participants were asked if this fits with their idea of quality, and if additional standards (beyond OCCL's regulations) should be included in this block.

Participant feedback was mixed. While some participants expressed comfort with licensing regulations alone being the standard for Star Level One designation, others felt strongly that more should be required for entry into Delaware Stars. Suggestions included:

- Conducting a verification visit (beyond that completed by OCCL) to ensure basic health and safety practices are met
- Requiring developmental screenings
- Adding nutrition standards
- Ensuring "best practice" is covered by OCCL regulations, and adding standards when it is not
- Requiring total compliance with OCCL regulations
- Ensuring standards are aligned with local fire codes
- Ensuring requirements "above the minimum," and looking to the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Head Start as examples.

Star Level Two: Leadership & Administration

Effective leaders and their administrative practices create the foundation for high-quality care and education. In the draft structure presented, Star Level Two includes standards around leadership and administration. This could include items like business practices, staff qualifications, and professional development requirements. Participants were asked to identify who should be categorized as a leader and to share what supports this group will need to be successful.

Participants identified leaders as:

- Teachers
- Coordinators
- Administrators
- Families
- Boards of Directors
- Child care business owners

Participants highlighted a need for support in the following areas:

- Quality assured training

- Online training
- In-person training
- Training cohorts
- Leadership training
- Continued support for and acceptance of credentials
- Flexible closing days supported by Purchase of Care
- Financial assistance for higher education
- Emotional support and encouragement
- Access to health care benefits
- Networking opportunities
- Succession planning
- Greater access to Technical Assistants

Star Level Three: Environment

High-quality environments support children’s learning and development. In the draft structure, Star Level Three emphasizes quality environments. While this level is conceptualized as a block of required standards, it is possible that a tool such as the Environmental Rating Scale or CLASS could be used to determine compliance in this area. Participants were asked to identify the components of high-quality environments. They emphasized:

- Having a variety and sufficient amount of developmentally appropriate materials that are readily available and accessible for children to use
- The need for flexibility based on the physical space being used
- The importance of a “welcoming” space
- Literacy resources
- The importance of teacher to child interactions
- The importance of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
- Quality environments are inclusive of all children, regardless of children’s needs
- Emphasizing “how environment is run” over physical space and materials
- The importance of flexibility to meet children’s needs and interests

Star Levels Four and Five: Interactions and Intentional Teaching

Positive interactions between educators and children form high-quality learning experiences. Teaching practices informed by rigorous, authentic assessment and reflection promote child learning. Star Levels Four and Five are conceptualized as points-based. A tool, such as the Environmental Rating Scale or CLASS, will be used to assess programs in this area. Participants were asked what supports are needed to ensure positive interactions and to support intentional teaching practices. They requested:

- Child mental health supports for school age children
- A cohort program for administrators
- Coaching as a follow-up activity for professional development/training
- Support for teachers of children with special needs
- A greater variety of “quality assured” training
- Lower ratios of children to teachers in classrooms
- Additional technical assistance around interactions

- A teacher resource center in New Castle County
- Training specific to measurement tools
- Training specific to curriculum usage
- Expansion of the pool of qualified staff

Conclusions

Overall, stakeholders attending information sessions are embracing the revision process and see value in the proposed structural changes. They continue to seek further alignment among Delaware Stars and the OCCL. Additionally, they desire more interaction with both Delaware Stars staff and peers. While participation by family child care providers was limited, they overwhelmingly support a system that embraces and supports the differences between in-home care and center-based care.

The advisory committee must now revisit the draft structure and address the following concerns, either by adjusting the structure or ensuring to-be-developed standards are addressed:

- To ensure alignment with OCCL while simultaneously building quality, include entrance criteria that adequately addresses health and safety while not being overly burdensome. Specifically, participating programs must ensure at entrance/Delaware Star Level One that appropriate policies and procedures are in place and evidenced by practice to support a safe experience in the early learning setting.
- Stakeholders indicate a great need for support for leaders and administrators. Most support a cohort training model, similar to the Aim4Excellence program previously used in Delaware. It bears noting that issues of workforce development and the availability of qualified staff were raised repeatedly.
- Interactions between teachers and children are of the utmost importance, and must be addressed at all levels of the system. The structure must support the improvement of interactions throughout, not just at Delaware Star Levels Four and Five.

References

Karoly, L.A., Schwartz, H.L., Setodji, C.M., Hass, A.C. (2016). Evaluation of Delaware Stars for Early Success: Final Report. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.