



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION AND PUBLIC WELFARE

September 14, 2012

Dear Provider:

Keystone STARS is one of the largest and most mature quality rating and improvement systems in the nation. Having just celebrated its 10 year anniversary, the Keystone STARS program must reach new heights in continuous quality improvement, just as it expects of the child care providers. The *Rising STARS* initiative focuses on access to the highest quality services for hard-to-reach / hard-to-serve children by providing supports to providers as they move up the quality scale to STAR 3 and 4 levels. *Rising STARS* is a two-pronged approach which redesigns: 1) the STARS grants and awards structure retroactive to July 1, 2012; and 2) the STARS subsidy add-on or tiered reimbursement rate, which will be effective January 1, 2013.

The Rising STARS grants and awards structure has been simplified to encourage continuous quality improvement and enrollment of at-risk children. To receive STARS awards, the minimum percentage of children receiving subsidy or with an Individualized Family Service Plan or Individualized Education Program that must be served has been increased from a 5% minimum to 10%.

The Start with STARS category was eliminated because Start with STARS is not recognized as a level of quality and therefore, the resources to administer this level can be better used promoting quality and maintaining quality at the higher STARS levels.

At the STAR 1 level, rather than universally providing Support grants to each eligible STAR 1 provider, grants will be targeted in selected communities to selected providers serving high-need, hard-to-serve populations who are committed to moving to at least a STAR 2 level. In addition to targeted financial support, these selected providers will receive intensive technical assistance and professional development to move to the next STAR level. Details on application for Rising STAR 1 grants (formerly Support grants) will be announced in late Fall 2012.

In addition, the Regional Keys will continue to offer technical assistance and professional development to all providers interested in enrolling in Keystone STARS and to STAR 1 providers who want to move up the STARS ladder.

The second prong of the Rising STARS initiative is to adjust the tiered reimbursement add-on rates for children receiving Child Care Works subsidy enrolled in Keystone STARS programs. In this new model, the Maximum Child Care Allowance (MCCA) - or rate ceiling - will be slightly lowered for all providers. Keystone STARS 2, 3 and 4 providers will be compensated with a tiered amount that will protect them from the rate reduction. STAR 1 providers will be compensated with a tiered amount that will protect their full-time rate and restore 75% of the part-time rate reduction. Because OCDEL values provider commitment to high quality early and education, STAR 2, 3 and 4 providers will receive a tiered reimbursement rate at or above the previous levels.

More detailed information about the Rising STARS initiative is available online in the form of an on-demand Elluminate session. You may access this session at your convenience by visiting: http://vclass.cciu.org/play_recording.html?recordingId=1249202167244_1346947326450 or by visiting <http://vclass.cciu.org> - clicking on Recordings – clicking September 6th on the calendar – clicking on the Keystone STARS link in the center of the page. The system requires a name and email address to launch the recording.

If you have questions regarding the Rising STARS initiative, please send email to Ra-ocdearlylearning@pa.gov, visit www.pakeys.org or contact your Regional Key.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara G. Minzenberg, Ph.D." in a cursive style.

Barbara G. Minzenberg, Ph.D.
Deputy Secretary

BGM/TK/kgv