



Summary report of STARS application and participation July 2009

Now in its sixth year, Vermont's STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) is meeting its goals: that of engaging the maximum number of regulated child care, early education and afterschool programs in achieving standards that are associated with better outcomes for children, families and the professionals who work with them.

- STARS is an agent for improving quality by engaging programs in investing in their program's growth. The number of participants has grown steadily since it began in 2004, with no indication that this will slow down.

Number of participants as of July 15, 2009

- 519 programs have submitted applications to STARS
- 412 programs hold certificates in STARS (have completed application process)
- 25 programs with submitted applications are in process of completing the application
- 138 programs are in their first year in STARS, 106 programs are in their second year and have completed an annual renewal, 168 programs have been in STARS for more than 2 years, renewing between 2 and 6 times
- 26 participating programs closed
- 34 programs discontinued participation by not completing the renewal
- 21 programs submitted applications and subsequently closed or chose not to continue
- 118 of 519 programs qualify for the streamlined process (NAEYC, NAFCC, NAA or NECPA accredited or Head Start Blue or Gold Certificate), 52 of these earned 5 stars by meeting the high standards of the new NAEYC accreditation process or were Head Start programs achieving Blue or Gold Certificates
- Approximately 11,000 children are enrolled in child care, early education and afterschool programs that are participating in STARS
- Approximately 2000 professionals are employed in programs that participate in STARS

The rate of incoming applications increased. There has been an average of 39 applications in the last 5 quarters compared to the previously steady rate of an average of 24 applications each quarter. This is in part because of public school preschool programs responding to Act 62 and programs accredited through NAEYC entering at the automatic 5 star level, as well as increasing awareness and interest across all regulated programs and across the state.

The number of participating programs represents approximately 24% of the licensed and registered programs in the state. While all types of programs participate in STARS, there are proportionally more licensed programs participating than registered programs. This is typical of registered and licensed program participation in local and state initiatives.

- To meet the goal that STARS is an agent for improving quality, participants will represent the full range of achievements. This shows that STARS is attractive to all levels, not just those have already demonstrated quality through other standards.

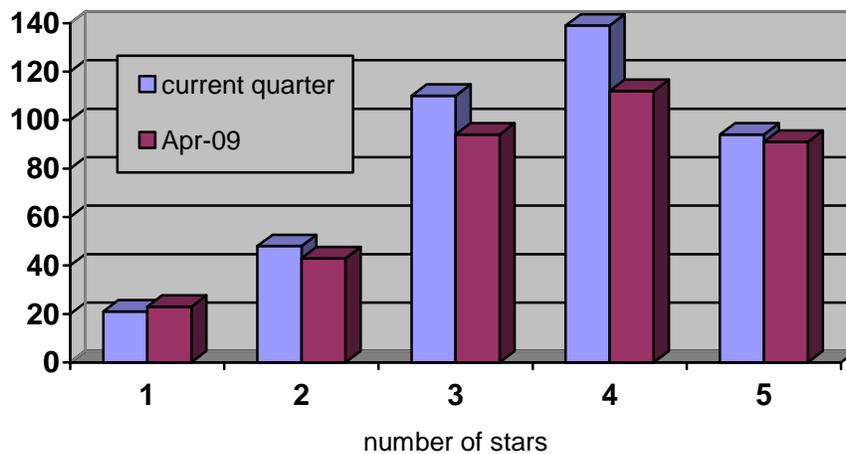
Programs participate in STARS at all star levels, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of stars achieved

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total
programs at level	21	48	110	139	94	412
percent of total	5%	12%	26%	34%	23%	

The following (Figure 1) is a graphic representation of Table 1 with the addition of the number of programs participating in April, 2009.

Figure 1. Distribution of stars among all programs, compared to April 2009



The figure shows that STARS is attracting programs at the more basic levels, with the potential to engage them in investing in their program's growth. It can be seen that 17% of the participants are at the 1- or 2-star level, continuing a decreasing trend. The number of 1 and 2 star programs once roughly equaled the 3 star programs – this balance has changed in the past 9 months. However, given that the total number of 1 and 2 star programs did not change much, this should be attributed to programs achieving higher star levels rather than a lack of participation in the entry levels.

There is an increase in the number of participants at the three and four star levels. For both of these star levels, the past 6 months has seen programs moving into these levels from the lower levels as well as newly applying programs coming in at these levels.

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- STARS participants represent all types of regulated programs in the state, including afterschool programs and public school preschool programs. STARS is showing it can promote program growth and achievement in all settings.

Table 2 shows the different types of regulated programs and how many of them are in STARS. As a point of comparison, the last column in the table shows the number of each type of program participating in April 2009.

Table 2. Number of stars by type of program

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total in July 09	total in April 09
afterschool	2	2	8	19	7	38	33
Head Start			1	3	25	29	28
licensed home		3	6	5	1	15	14
licensed center	7	11	27	44	43	132	111
public school preschool		2	22	51	12	87	74
registered home	12	29	46	18	6	111	103
grand total	21	47	110	140	94	412	363

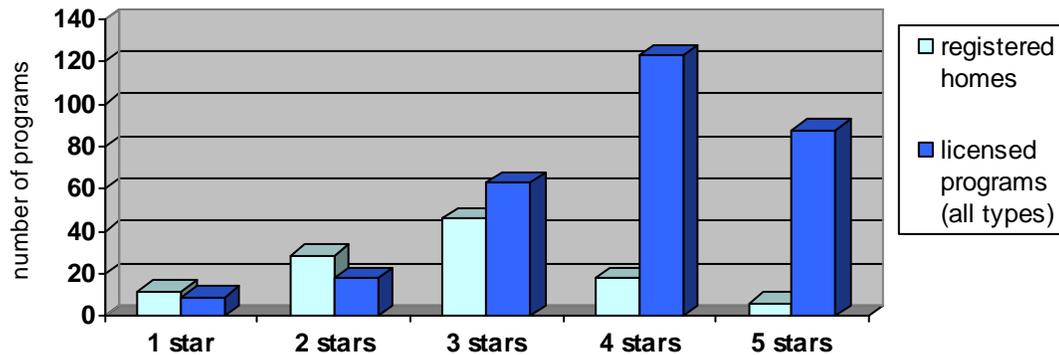
Unlike the previous quarter, where the most marked increases were with public school preschool, this quarter showed increases in all types of programs – with notable increases in afterschool programs and licensed centers.

Table 3. Number of stars by type of program, registered homes compared to licensed centers

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total	percent of all in state
registered homes	12	29	46	18	6	111	10%
licensed programs (all types)	9	18	63	123	88	301	46%
total	21	47	110	140	94	412	24%

Figure 2 is a graphic representation of the data in Table 3.

Figure 2. Number of stars by registered and licensed programs



The large number of licensed programs at the 4 and 5 star levels reflects the participation of accredited programs and qualifying Head Start programs. Of the 103 NAEYC accredited programs in the state, 79% are in STARS. All 7 (100%) of NAA accredited afterschool programs and all 10 (100%) of NAFCC accredited family child care programs participate in STARS. All the Head Start programs are represented in STARS, even though not all individual licensed sites are currently participating.

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- STARS continues to attract participants from across the state. It is the case that the number of participants per district is not uniformly proportional to the number of programs per district, though the regional differences are decreasing. However, there are still areas where the participation rate differs from expectation.

In Table 4, the number of programs participating in each AHS district is shown. The last column in the table shows the percentage of programs participating in STARS in that region. With 24% of regulated programs participating statewide, it can be seen which areas have higher than expected participation and which areas have lower than expected participation. The statewide participation rates show one area at the lower end and one county at the higher end, with the others distributing themselves around the expected rate.

The table also shows how the current distribution compares to the regional participation rates in April 2009. The areas that showed the greatest increase in participation during the quarter were the Windham County/Brattleboro area, the Springfield/Windsor County area, and both Addison and Chittenden counties, though growth was well-distributed throughout the state

Table 4. Number of programs participating in each AHS district

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total in July 09	total in April 09	percent of county
Franklin/Grand Isle	8	6	8	16	8	46	42	21%
Chittenden/Burlington	2	9	21	32	24	88	73	25%
Hartford/ White Rvr Jct	1	2	9	10	3	25	23	22%
Caledonia/St.Johnsbury	1	1	6	6	8	22	22	21%
Windham/Brattleboro	2	7	11	6	6	32	26	35%
Washington/Montpelier	2	6	8	11	5	32	30	16%
Orleans/Newport	2	3	9	10	5	29	27	30%
Rutland		3	15	10	6	34	31	20%
Windsor/Springfield	1	1	4	7	6	19	15	25%
Bennington	1	4	4	12	11	32	31	32%
Lamoille/Morrisville	1	1	11	9	4	26	24	27%
Addison/Middlebury		4	4	11	8	27	19	24%
total	21	47	110	140	94	412	363	

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- To meet the goal that STARS is a tool programs use to implement quality improvements, STARS must demonstrate that programs increase their point levels over time.

Point and star level characteristics of programs that have renewed

Programs renew and update their participation in STARS annually. Examining the point profiles for the renewing programs provides information about achievements that are indicators of quality. The results indicate that STARS is promoting program growth.

Application updates have been completed on 277 continuing programs. As of July 2009, 168 programs have been in STARS longer than 2 years (participated in a 2nd renewal or more). Twenty-one of these programs have been in STARS for over 4 years and are now in their fifth or sixth year. These statistics include 13 programs that dropped out of STARS for a period of time and then reentered.

For the summaries reported here, current point and star levels are compared to the programs' original point and star levels. That is, those programs renewing more than once are compared to their starting placement rather than their previous year's levels.

Table 5. Change in star level with renewal

	increased	stayed same	decreased	total
number of programs	129	133	15	277

Of the 277, 15 decreased their point levels enough that they achieved a lower star level than when they started. Point decreases are for a variety of reasons: Some are programs that go from registered home to licensed home, losing points in some arenas. Others are previously accredited programs that had received automatic points and did not verify that the standards were met or otherwise were unable to verify that the standards were maintained. A small number of programs lost points due to serious licensing violations. Over time, many programs that decrease their star levels have regained or exceeded their original levels in subsequent renewals.

One hundred thirty three programs stayed at the same star level (48%). Of these, 87 are 4 or 5 star programs (programs that began STARS with a high level of points). The star levels of the programs that maintained the same level of stars is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Programs staying at the same star level at renewal

	stayed at 1	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars
number of programs	7	7	32	58	29

Among the 277 programs that have been in STARS for at least one year, 14 have opted to remain at a 1 or 2 star level – 5% of the renewing participants.

Some programs changed their point profile, earning more or fewer points across the different arenas. Many programs use the flexibility of the point system to gain and lose points according to their accomplishments, yet still maintain their overall star level. Other programs change star levels.

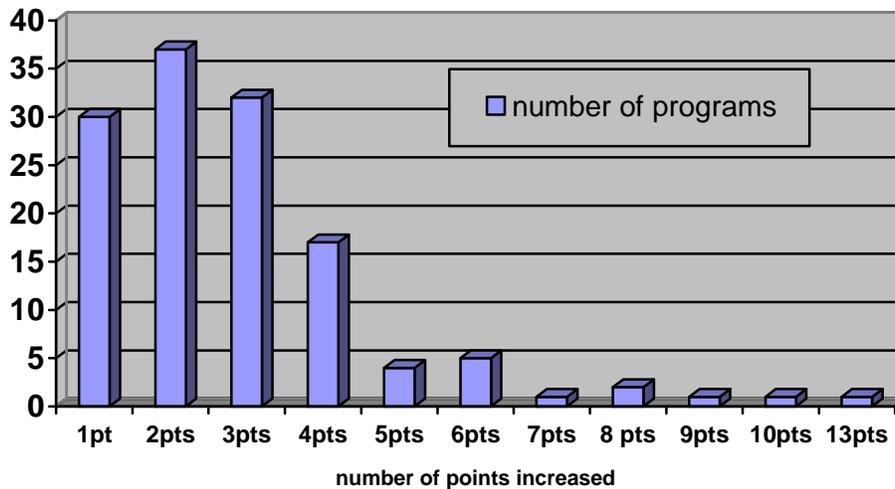
Table 7. Programs increasing their star level over original application

started with:	increased to:	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars
1 star		12	7	3	1
2 stars			18	4	2
3 stars				36	3
4 stars					43
total		12	25	43	49

Of 277 programs, 135 (49%) programs increased their overall point level. One hundred twenty nine (129) programs increased their point levels enough that they achieved a higher star level than the previous year, and 6 programs increased points without increasing star level. More programs increased their points enough to achieve a higher star level than in previous quarters. Increases ranged from 1 to 13 points with an average increase of about 3 points. Figure 3 depicts the magnitude of the point increases for these programs.

The large number of programs increasing point levels indicates that STARS is successful in encouraging program growth and accomplishments. The achievement of more points and stars is within reach of many of the participating programs.

Figure 3. Increases in the number of points programs earned



The 135 programs that increased point levels did so by increasing points across the 5 arenas, with 99 programs increasing points in more than one arena.

Table 8 summarizes program increases in points according to STARS arena.

Table 8. Number of programs increasing points in the five arenas

	1 point increase	2 point increase	3 point increase	total number of programs
compliance history	39	12	0	51
qualifications and training	49	9	4	62
families and community	56	30	6	92
program assessment	41	9	1	51
administration	50	15	7	72

Particularly noteworthy among the renewing programs:

- The Families and Community arena continues to show the greatest number of programs increasing points – 92 of the 135 programs (68%) increased their point level here. This indicates that programs are doing more to engage families and becoming more active as professionals in their community. Programs are also becoming more committed to including children needing specialized services, and more committed to leadership roles. Family and professional involvement are indicators of inclusive practices as well as willingness to advocate for families and the profession. This may be an arena that challenges programs, yet programs are clearly meeting this challenge.
- The Administration arena was another arena where many programs increased points. This arena recognizes business practices for providing appropriate staff support, designing and implementing clear operating policies and practices for families and staff members, and maintaining a financially sound program. The 72 programs that increased points in this arena are increasing their support for the work force.
- The Qualifications and Training arena shows 62 programs increasing points, indicating that these programs documented higher levels of staff training over the previous year. Staff qualifications and training are consistent indicators of program quality and positive outcomes for children.
- 24 programs have increased to 5 stars through NAEYC accreditation under the new portfolio process and 3 increased to 5 stars by achieving Head Start Blue Certificates.

Summary of findings

STARS continues to be an agent for improving quality by engaging programs in investing in their program's growth. The number of participants has grown steadily, with no indication that this will slow down (steady-to-increasing rate of submission).

The participants continue to represent the full range of program type and regional participation. STARS attracts participants in all star levels, demonstrating wide appeal and programs' interest in receiving recognition for all achievements.

Participating programs are invested in renewing their participation. Renewing programs with room to grow consistently increase their achievements over time, even in subsequent years – especially in supporting staff and in connecting with their families and the community.