

External Relations Notes
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

February 20, 2020 – Waco

TWC Child Care and Early Learning staff hosted a regional stakeholder meeting in Waco on Thursday, February 20, 2020. Lindsay Hill opened the meeting with an overview of the Texas Rising Star (TRS) 4-year review process and the workgroup's recommendations. A summary of the recommendations can be found at <https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/trs-4-yr-review-recommendations-twc.pdf>. Ms. Hill noted that the TWC Commissioners will consider the recommendations and stakeholder input before making decisions and that some revisions may require more discussion by the workgroup or TWC. Ms. Hill invited the attendees to offer comments or questions.

A provider asked about a workgroup recommendation to weight Category 2: Teacher-Child Interactions at 40% of a provider's total score. Ms. Hill confirmed that Category 2 would be weighted at 40% and that Category 1: Director and Staff Qualifications and Training, Category 3: Program Administration, and Category 4: Indoor/Outdoor Environments would each be weighted at 20%. Reagan Miller mentioned that a tool is being developed that will help providers estimate their scores under the new scenario. Ms. Hill estimated the tool will be available in 30 to 45 days.

A provider expressed support for the recommendation to reduce the financial impact of licensing deficiencies and said HHSC Child Care Licensing (CCL) can be biased. Ms. Hill said that TWC is working to cross-train CCL and TRS mentors and assessors so they can better understand each other and provide better support to child care programs.

Janell Frazier with Head Start in Bell County said that Head Start programs are required to participate in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). She asked how Head Start programs fit into the recommendations and said Head Start should be at the table if they would be affected. Ms. Hill said there have been discussions about how to better integrate Head Start and TRS. Allison Wilson said statute limits TRS to licensed providers that are serving subsidized children. She said the recommended changes consider Head Start programs that are providing wraparound care and that want to have a partnership with a Board to provide full-day care. These programs would be able to participate in TRS and receive enhanced rates for children who qualify for subsidized child care. Ms. Frazier said 100% of children served in Head Start are in poverty and that they provide wraparound care. She asked if extended care could be included. Ms. Wilson said extended care could be provided if a parent needs it in order to work or attend school. She said TWC is working with the state Head Start office and association and that TWC also is working for a partnership with Head Start, Early Head Start, and public Pre-K. Ms. Miller said that TWC is working on another online tool to help programs calculate the financial benefit of becoming a TRS program at different star levels using reimbursement rates for each Board area based on current enrollment.

Ms. Frazier asked what the biggest burden for providers is for participating in TRS. Ms. Miller said that the new background checks were a challenge when they first came out but that, as the system has grown and evolved, the challenges have become less burdensome. She said there will be bumps any time there are changes but that the changes seem to be working. She wants to hear from mentors and assessors about challenges programs are facing. Ms. Wilson said that, as part of this process, the

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workgroup focused on streamlining and simplifying TRS so that the recommendations would not be more burdensome than what providers are doing now.

A provider expressed concern about the recommendation to use the term “teacher” to promote the professionalization of the early childhood field. She believes this will lead to teachers wanting higher pay. Ms. Hill acknowledged the challenges of teacher retention and adequate pay. Another provider mentioned a website and a training she attended in Dallas about wage scales and what teachers should be paid based on their education level. She said providers should ensure they are paying staff the right amount according to their levels of training and that it gives self-worth and value and helps kids.

Ms. Hill mentioned that the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) has a career pathways chart that teachers and directors can use to see where they are on the path. She said that knowing the going rate in the area could help retain staff and a good environment also helps with staff retention. Ms. Miller mentioned that labor market information is available on the TWC website.

A mentor from Workforce Solutions Central Texas mentioned that background checks take a long time for people coming in from other states which is an issue for the Fort Hood area. Ms. Miller said the federal government is asking states to post information on their websites to facilitate connections with other states. Some states have laws that limit the release of information but that it still has to be requested.

A provider mentioned that CCL requires a person who has not gotten a background check back to be removed from their system in seven days, or they can be dinged.

A board staff person mentioned issues with getting trainings to validate in TECPDS. Ms. Hill mentioned that a TECPDS meeting will take place in each Board area to discuss the registry as part of a statewide rollout. She said the workgroup recommended that TRS providers use the registry.

A provider asked for an explanation of recommendations regarding curriculum. Ms. Hill said the recommendations would eliminate the very specific curriculum and lesson planning measures. The measures would instead focus on what kind of curriculum a provider is using and whether the curriculum is being implemented. If a provider is using a formal, purchased curriculum, it would need to satisfy a rubric that TWC is creating and be approved. If a provider is using an emergent or piecemeal curriculum, they will need to show the objective. The measure would also look at how a program supports teachers in implementing the curriculum, such as whether teachers have planning time outside the classroom.

A provider asked about centers where the teacher is not developing the lesson plans. Ms. Hill said that center would score a 0; it should be the person who is in the classroom and who knows the children best planning the instruction. Ms. Hill further explained that teacher supports could also include books and online resources. The measures also would look at whether formal or informal child assessment are being used, and if so, how they are informing lesson planning.

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A provider mentioned that her program uses Frog Street and that, for her TRS, she was told teachers had to post additional forms in addition to the Frog Street cards to show their plans. This required extra time. Ms. Hill said this is an example of why the workgroup wanted to change the measure. She said that, ideally, the assessor would see what curriculum the program is using and watch it being implemented. An assessor said that she understands that, for a center that does not use a bought curriculum, assessors should look for learning goals on a lesson plan. Ms. Hill said that is correct.

A provider asked when the curriculum changes will be implemented. Ms. Hill said the goal for full implementation is January 2021. Ms. Wilson said that TWC participated in a Texas Education Agency resource review to develop a rubric and is looking to leverage it. A Texas School Ready provider asked if her curriculum would be approved; Ms. Hill said it most likely would be.

Ms. Frazier asked if there was any discussion with CCL on deficiencies that would need weighting. Ms. Miller said that, as part of the review, the workgroup recommended moving two deficiencies from high to medium and removing a medium deficiency altogether. A Board staff person asked whether consideration was given to adding safe sleep to the deficiencies list. Ms. Hill said the workgroup discussed whether other deficiencies should be added and opted not to do so. A provider spoke in support of proposed changes to the impact of deficiencies on providers.

A provider asked whether the proposed addition of a new TRS 1-star level would move all current TRS providers up a level. Ms. Hill said that TRS 1-star programs would only have to meet the screening form criteria and would not receive enhanced rates, monitoring, or assessment. She said 1-star programs could receive mentoring if they want. She clarified that adding a 1-star level would not have an impact on providers that are already TRS 2, 3 or 4-star but that it is hoped that it would drive subsidy providers to move up in quality. A provider asked how this will be explained to parents. Ms. Hill said that the workgroup recommended development of an outreach plan to educate parents on TRS and the different star levels.

A provider asked for an explanation of the online training registry, TECPDS. Ms. Hill explained that TECPDS has a trainer registry and now a workforce one. Staff transcripts, diplomas, and training can be stored in the online database and always be accessible to staff in their own online portfolios. TECPDS will map the person's career pathway and prevent loss of information. Staff will be able to take the information with them if they change schools, and directors will be able to produce certificates and view their staffs' information. Ms. Hill said that anyone on the certified Texas trainer registry will be able to generate certificates and place them in participants' folders. Staff can choose to black out information on their documents if they only want to show that a diploma was awarded or for which classes they received credit. She said information for the current and previous years would need to be entered. The deadline for entering the information would depend on where a provider is in the recertification process. Providers initially coming into the TRS program and those being recertified when the Workforce Registry requirement becomes effective will be affected. She said the Boards will work with providers.

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A provider asked for elaboration on the new nutrition measure. Ms. Hill said that, currently, Category 4 is Nutrition and Indoor/Outdoor Environment which the workgroup determined do not relate. The workgroup changed Category 4 to Indoor/Outdoor Environments only and added a streamlined nutrition measure under Category 3: Program Administration. Other nutrition measures are condensed under Category 2: Teacher-Child Interactions. The measures also would look how a program supports the overall health and wellness of a child and family, such as whether the program provides resources and supports to families on topics such as oral health, breastfeeding, screen time, and how to access benefits, or whether the program is working with a child care health consultant.

A provider asked how a program could earn a zero in the nutrition and outdoor environment category. Ms. Hill recommended having the mentor go over the provider's results with the assessor. She said that, under the new measures, a provider would have to provide no supports at all in order to get a zero.

Another provider asked about changes to child assessments. Ms. Hill reiterated that the new measures focus on whether assessments are formal or informal and how they assessments are being used to inform instruction. Providers would need to show proof that they are doing what they say. Ms. Miller said that a lot was learned from the first TRS review and that the current workgroup included more providers. She said that TWC will keep listening to feedback and make improvements. Ms. Hill said that comments can be emailed to trs4yearreview@twc.state.tx.us.

An Early Head Start provider asked what tool would be used to measure teacher-child interactions. Ms. Hill said it is a TWC-developed tool that mimics the language of CLASS. The Early Head Start provider said that a lot of their coaching is based on the CLASS tool. It was mentioned that tools and forms are available on the TRS website at <https://texasrisingstar.org/>.

Ms. Frazier said Head Start used to depend on TWC and Child Care Services for pre-service training and asked if there is a reason it is not provided. Ms. Hill said this is a local Board decision.

Pattie Herbert, a licensed home provider who served on a previous TRS review workgroup, asked whether the workgroup discussed how to get more licensed home centers into TRS. She said there were only 2 or 3 licensed home centers in TRS five years ago. Ms. Miller said there was general discussion of a TRS outreach campaign for parents and providers. Ms. Herbert offered to participate and said that many parents want their infants and toddlers in a smaller environment and that there needs to be a focus on better quality for home providers. She said well-established home providers do not want to be part of TRS. Ms. Hill mentioned that family home care networks currently being piloted in some areas could help.