

External Relations Notes
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

February 4, 2020 – Austin

TWC Child Care and Early Learning staff hosted the first of a series of regional stakeholder meetings in Austin on Tuesday, February 4, 2020.

The meeting began with an overview of the process and proposed revisions resulting from the Texas Rising Star (TRS) 4-year review. Lindsey Hill mentioned that the Texas Government Code and Texas Administrative code require TWC to review TRS guidelines at least every four years. The last review and revision took place in 2015. She said that TWC has been updating the TRS Workgroup webpage throughout the process. The webpage includes a stakeholder meeting calendar and corresponding documents in a draft revised format. The TWC Commissioners will consider workgroup recommendations which have been posted on the website, along with public input, prior to making final decisions. The attendees were invited to provide comment or ask questions.

Joan Altobelli with Extend-A-Care YMCA asked for details on proposed changes to staff training requirements. Would the changes require more hours? She mentioned that she has school-age programs. Ms. Hill said the changes would clarify and streamline the requirements. Staff would have 6 or 7 ways by which they could meet education requirements.

Stacy Jo Signaigo with Manor ISD Child Development Center asked for an explanation of the proposed 1-star TRS designation, whether this is intended for providers in the subsidy program that are not in TRS and whether the intent is that these providers would try to improve their quality. Ms. Hill said that the Workgroup's intent is to look at programs that are already serving subsidized kids to see if they can pass the screening form. If so, they can receive a star. The long-range goal is to move all providers up in star levels and to identify which providers Boards should be working with. Allison Wilson noted that TWC is looking to automate the process for identifying those providers. Further clarification was provided that there are no TRS requirements on the 1-star providers; it is just a licensing compliance level.

A provider asked TWC staff to explain Category 3: Lesson Planning and Curriculum. Ms. Hill explained that the Workgroup recommended taking away lesson plans and looking at whether the program uses curriculum in all age groups; what supports, time and resources are being provided; and, if child assessments are being used, how they are informing lesson plans. There would not be a written policy, but program procedure and policy would be looked at. The idea was to see documented evidence of it being implemented. Ms. Signaigo commented that, if we are going to follow National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards, it should be in a provider's policy. She would like to see it as a written policy and suggested it could fall under the training component.

Ms. Altobelli asked for a side-by-side comparison of the old standards versus the new recommendations. It was determined that a side-by-side could be emailed to those who signed in for the meeting but could not be posted online at this time due to accessibility issues.

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Ms. Altobelli asked for an explanation of recommendations relating provider published rates versus Board rates. Reagan Miller explained that, currently, if a provider's published rates for private pay parents is less than the Board's maximum rate, the Board cannot pay the higher rate. She said the TWC Commissioners understand that the recommendation to change this policy so that Board can pay up to their maximum rate is an effort to impact the quality of care but that this would be giving money to people who have not asked for it. She said staff is doing research into this issue and that the Workgroup's recommendations are tied to quality. Boards cover urban and rural areas and set their maximum rates for are set for the entire area. Some providers may not be able to charge private pay parents more, but higher rates could help them invest in quality. She said TWC also needs to look at the impact of allowing Boards to pay higher than the provider's rates on the number of kids that can be served with available funds.

Ms. Altobelli commented that this does not affect her facility but that it could be a factor in rural areas. She recommended giving providers all the money possible. Ms. Signaigo said this issue does occur in Manor. Her program is a 4-star program. She said it makes sense that a provider would not get the published rate if they do not charge that much. She asked how reimbursement rates are determined.

Ms. Wilson provided background information on how the annual market rate survey is used to sample providers for information on their rates by age group and type of care. Rates were recently increased to meet ACF targets which are likely to increase over time. She noted that Boards can set higher rates using the market rate survey for their respective areas. She mentioned TWC is in the beginning stages of a cost of child care quality study, an 18-month project that will inform rate setting in the future.

A participant noted that staff retention is expensive and suggested looking at the cost of hiring good people.

Another provider said suggested allowing marketing around the TRS brand to add value and possibility allowing a center to receive a differential if they market the brand. He said parents do not understand the value of TRS and that he spends time marketing it. Logos, websites, etc., would make it easier. Ms. Miller said that Workgroup recommended that TWC consider a statewide outreach campaign for TRS to better educate parents about quality and TRS.

David Feigen with Texans Care for Children asked whether, with the increase in CCDBG funding, there is any consideration of mandating provider to be 1-star TRS. Ms. Miller said the Workgroup asked TWC to create a level 1, indicating a provider is meeting basic licensing standards, and to set a long-range plan to encourage all providers to be TRS. She mentioned that Ohio has an 8-year plan and asked for input on an appropriate timeframe. It was suggested that 3-4 years could be a timeframe for a provider to get to 1-star and that there could be a requirement that they increase one star-level every year, though some programs may need more time. Some would not make it past the first year.

Ms. Miller mentioned that the Workgroup said it is not just about requiring everyone to be in TRS but about raising the level of quality and what that should be. Should all providers be required to get to 2 or 3 stars? How long do they have? What happens if they do not? What about rural areas that do not

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have many providers? Many factors need to be considered in a long-range plan. The intent is that kids should be in quality care.

A participant commented that providers operate at different paces and that it might be too much pressure for some. Another commented that providers want to keep quality teachers.

Ms. Signaigo said TWC should step back and do more education to help providers articulate the value of TRS and be able to educate parents. She mentioned that NAEYC is turning child care into a profession and leading people to look at them differently. She held parent meetings to educate them about TRS and what her program was doing. It made parents value them more.

Cathy McHorse with United Way ATX said data is needed to support the case that more dollars are needed to provide quality. She suggested that it should be mandatory for all providers to be TRS 1-star in order to improve collection of data needed to demonstrate the value of quality. She noted that Travis County has a coalition to improve child care quality, but less than half of kids are in quality programs. She noted that high quality centers have a handful of subsidized kids while non-quality providers serve many more. She said incentives are not enough.

A participant suggested combining Child Care Licensing and TRS. Ms. Miller noted that this would require legislative action.

Ms. Signaigo mentioned the idea of a business plan as part of determining a 1-star designation. Shay Everitt mentioned that Commit in Dallas has developed a spreadsheet that shows revenues compared to what they could be at different star levels. Ms. Miller said TWC is using this format and inputting Board rates to create a tool that can be posted for use across the state. She mentioned that TWC also is implementing a provision in HB 680 to improve data matching between TWC and TEA by assigning PEIMS number to children in care. This will allow for tracking educational and career outcomes of kids in TRS programs and those who are not. This is scheduled to be completed in a year. Another provision asked for better reporting of kids in TRS in the annual report on child care. By the end of February, TWC expects to post the data by Board online and will update the data quarterly.

A participant asked why providers would be required to move up if they are maintaining the same level of quality. He noted those stay at 1 star could skew data. Ms. Miller said that it was a Workgroup recommendation for consideration. There would be no requirement for 1-stars to provide higher levels of care; they would just need to have no licensing issues as demonstrated through the screening form. She said parents are choosing to put their kids in programs that have deficiencies and that there is nothing to prevent subsidy funds from going to them. The level 1 TRS could address that.

A participant expressed concern that a provider with licensing deficiencies could market themselves as a TRS provider and said this would drag down the brand. Ms. McHorse said that, without a requirement, people assume a 1-star is bad and that no star simply means it is not rated. She said the most vulnerable do not have the luxury of being able to check for deficiencies. Ms. Miller said the idea of a screening form to ensure some higher standards came from a concern about watering down standards.

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Asked about the implementation timeline, Ms. Hill described the TWC rule development process and said the rules could be effective by October 5 with rolling implementation expected to begin in January. There would be a freeze from October to December while training for assessors, mentors, and early learning centers takes place. Current TRS providers would not be reevaluated until they are due for their next visit.

Cindy Gamez with Austin Public Health asked about the assessor certification. Developed by CLI, certification will be required for assessors. Mentors will be trained only.

Mr. Feigen asked how recommended changes to Health and Nutrition standards work with new licensing standards required by legislation. The Workgroup recommended eliminating duplicate measures and creating a new points-based measure on health and nutrition standards and parent supports. Examples provided included information and/or resources on oral health, health insurance, medical resources, breastfeeding, etc. Mr. Feigen suggested including mental health.

A participant requested clarification regarding recommended changes relating to lesson plans. The 13 specific measures for lesson planning were removed and consolidated into more meaningful measures. Instructional strategies were moved to Category 2 (interactions).

Ms. McHorse voiced support for splitting measures for group size and ratio as they are two different measures of quality. She asked for clarification of a new measure under parent education and involvement. Ms. Hill said it would focus on compensatory supports for staff such as health benefits, paid sick or personal leave, paid planning time, etc.

A participant asked how many TRS programs offer benefits and said it would be good to know if it is working. Ms. Hill said this measure would help TWC gather data. The participant suggested this could be part of shared services.

A participant asked whether there would be a presentation at the March 7 Austin Chapter -Texas Association for the Education of Young Children conference. Kim Kofron with the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children said that she will look into this.

Ms. Hill mentioned that the recommendations will be discussed at the next Early Childhood Learning Summit which will take place July 29-31 at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel.

Participants were informed that TWC is taking written comments at trs4yearreview@twc.state.tx.us and that information and resources will continue to be made available on the TRS Workgroup Review webpage.