

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

## February 12, 2020 – Houston

TWC Child Care and Early Learning staff hosted a regional stakeholder meeting in Houston on Wednesday, February 12, 2020.

Lindsay Hill provided an overview of the proposed revisions resulting from the Texas Rising Star (TRS) 4-year review and mentioned that TWC is required under the Texas Government Code and Texas Administrative Code to review TRS guidelines at least every four years. The last review and revision was done in 2015. The TWC Commissioners will consider workgroup recommendations and public input prior to making final decisions. Information and documents are posted on the TRS workgroup webpage. Revised guidelines and a webinar will be made available soon. Participants were invited to provide comments or ask questions.

A provider said that she likes that all providers would have to be at least TRS 1-star. She wants all providers to be held accountable because kids from other facilities may come to her center. Ms. Hill clarified that the Level 1 means the provider is meeting screening form requirements indicating they are not exceeding certain licensing deficiencies. There would be no other requirements on Level 1 providers. She further clarified that only providers participating in subsidized child care could request to become TRS. It would not be a requirement, but it would be an opportunity to see which providers qualify for TRS. TWC would be looking to automate the screening form process.

A registered home provider said that she does not agree that lack of TRS status indicates a provider is not meeting or exceeding the standards. She asked if licensed homes would be required to be Level 1 and what would happen to those that do not qualify for it. Ms. Hill said that home providers would be included. She said providers would not be required to be Level 1 but that those that qualify will get the star. The long-range goal is for providers to be in TRS at some level. However, if a provider does not meet the 1-star requirements, there would be no initial consequence. It would be a flag for a Board area. Boards may look at resources they have to help that program.

A provider noted that Level 1 provider would not be getting higher reimbursements and asked if they would have access to the services available to TRS providers. Ms. Hill said they could, depending on local board initiatives.

A provider said that she likes the proposed requirement for TRS providers to enroll in the Texas Workforce Registry but said providers need help with it and that it is overwhelming to start the process and then maintain it. Another provider asked for more information about the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS). Ms. Hill said that the Texas Workforce Registry is an online platform in which child care staff and providers can input information such as work history and training. This would help show how TRS providers are meeting Category 1 criteria and also helps TWC to know the demographics of the workforce. She said statewide rollout of the system has started. This proposal would require TRS providers to participate. Board staff would be able to assist providers with inputting their records.

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

A provider said that they are new to TRS and had difficulties due to differences in curriculum and lesson plan requirements under TRS and Texas School Ready. They asked if the proposed revisions would address this. Ms. Hill acknowledged that this issue had been mentioned. She said the revisions remove measures focused on the number of activities for each learning domain. Instead, the proposed measures would look at the type of curriculum, how teachers and staff are supported to create lesson plans, interactions, and intentional activities.

Kaye Boehning with Tomorrow's Promise, Inc. asked if there are any provisions to address differences in Montessori programs which she believes create a mismatch the TRS requirements, such as those relating to group size and curriculum. Ms. Hill noted that the group size measure is points-based, not required. Proposed changes in curriculum measures may provide a better match. Ms. Hill asked Ms. Boehning to follow up with additional input to help TWC be more inclusive.

The registered home provider said that it is taxing to maintain multiple sets of lesson plans for each age group in her home. She does not serve many children but has frequent changes in the age levels of those in her care. She also had an issue with Child Care Licensing which visited her home just after it was flooded and cited deficiencies. Months later, she is being cited for insufficient training hours. She attributed this to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's new system making it difficult for her to produce documentation of her training. She is being told she may lose a star level. She believes there should be provisions for providers that experience a major event such as a flood. Ms. Hill said the proposed revisions would look at limiting the impact of a first occurrence to probation. Consistent licensing issues would impact a provider's star level. Ms. Hill said the Workforce Registry would enable providers to maintain documentation of training online instead of having to rely on paper documentation.

Patricia Osborn with YMCA asked if the Workforce Registry would be required. They already save their documentation somewhere else. Ms. Hill said the workgroup recommendation is to require it. A participant mentioned that some entities automatically upload information to TECPDS. Martha Gonzales with Gulf Coast said some do transfer information into TECPDS. She said training on TECPDS will be provided at the end of March; the Board will notify providers of the training by email. Ms. Hill said that is part of the statewide rollout of the Workforce Registry. Ms. Osborn asked if the database would speak with other platforms used by businesses, such as Cronos, Procure, SmartCare, Brightwheel, or other applications providers use. It was mentioned that trainers need to have a number in order to upload information into the Workforce Registry.

Michael Gonzalez, TRS Workgroup member and child care provider with Kids R Kids, said that it will take time to get used to TECPDS. Providers can create their own certificates and upload them when training their own staff. He said it is not set up to match to other systems and that it takes time to build those partnerships and enter into contracts. Ms. Osborn said YMCA is moving everything to Cronos and using this to ensure all employees are taking the training. She asked if a provider will be dropped from TRS for choosing not to use TECPDS. Mr. Gonzalez said TRS providers would be required to use the Workforce Registry. There was additional discussion regarding the ability of trainers to upload information into TECPDS so that providers do not have to do that work and the ability of providers to batch upload

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

training information to the system. Reagan Miller mentioned that TWC may send staff from the TECPDS Advisory Council to the Board's meeting in March to hear more about these issues.

A provider expressed concern that staff can take training paid for by the provider and leave as soon as the training information is put into the system. She said TECPDS makes it easier for the employees to leave because they do not have to ask for copies of their training documentation.

Mandi Kimball with Children at Risk, a member of the TRS workgroup, said the TRS 1-star would open the door to providers that are not currently on a quality path. She expressed support for this and said the providers will need access to mentors and assessors and all the supports to get them on the quality path. She recommends adding a timeframe for providers to move up in quality from a 1-star. Rather than it be a long-term goal, she said that, if people are receiving government supports, they should be required to be part of the Quality Rating System. She asked what the transition period would be for the provider to get to a 2-star. She said they should not just be sitting on a one. Ms. Kimball said that, looking across the state, there are innovative child care providers seizing opportunities to do public-private assessments or doing assessments. She suggested that TWC consider giving points to providers that are offering additional supports and recognizing the whole child.

Ms. Miller said the workgroup had a lot of discussion about whether providers should have a time limit to move up in star levels and that they also discussed ensuring providers have a basic level of quality as demonstrated by a 1-star. If providers come in at 1-star, they should be required to move up over time. The workgroup said it should be a long-term goal that TWC adopts. However, rural area stakeholders have said they do not have enough providers as it is. What if providers do not want to be a 1 star? For urban areas, the discussion is about how to promote quality with a 1-star rating but with a long-range plan that anyone who wants to get subsidies has to meet the requirement.

A provider mentioned that she is serving more subsidized kids, but sometimes she does not get paid for one or two weeks or more at a time, and she does not know why but believes it has to do with state funding. She said that if they are being expected to reach a bar and jump through hoops, there needs to be help to ensure they get paid.

Ms. Boehning mentioned that one employee's actions in front of Child Care Licensing resulted in multiple deficiencies and loss of her Montessori school's TRS status even though the employee was terminated. She believes that, if the provider fixes the problem, they should not lose a star or TRS status. Another participant suggested she appeal. Ms. Miller said the workgroup understood that one deficiency is not necessarily an indication of poor quality. They recommended not taking immediate actions that impact a provider's star level and reimbursement but allowing time to fix the issue and making sure they do. Participants expressed support for this approach.

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

Ms. Boehning also mentioned difficulty finding staff in rural areas. She said she is willing to train staff in Montessori. She said her facility gets staff who cannot afford college or who were not successful in school, but they are good teachers. She wants to help them be successful. She said she has staff with two years of experience and 150 hours of training. Another provider asked what incentive would staff have to stay in child care after they have received training. A rural provider said that, once they get a CDA while working with her, staff go to the public-school system which offers better hours, pay, and working conditions. She said it takes a lot of work to attain a quality rating and maintain it; another center will not be able to get there because they do not have the quality on paper despite having good staff.

Shay Everitt said that, aside from the TRS revisions, TWC is working on other arrangements that can help address these issues, such as an Early Childhood Apprenticeship program, programs that incentivize staff to stay at a program for years, and partnerships with school districts in which a child care center is at the core of teacher training. She said this is part of a larger discussion.

A provider mentioned that they have working with an ISD to bring back the CDA Career and Technical Education program. One high school is about to start the program. She is allowing the school to provide training in her facility. A participant mentioned that the school district has to be willing to participate. Ms. Miller said TWC has heard about the challenges of working with ISDs but that CDA partnerships with ISDs are happening more nationally. A provider said ISDs see it as money being taken from them.

A provider mentioned concerns about delays in receiving reimbursements and being told different reasons for the delay which may include technical issues, software glitches, or a delay in the release of funds from the state. He said it can take weeks to correct glitches. He said that sometimes he is not told until the day of an expected release that the funds are being delayed. He believes information is being withheld.

LaShonda Hollins-Brown with the Children's Learning Institute provided information about free CDA training resources available to TRS providers on CLI Engage. Infant-toddler classes are being added in 2020.

A provider questioned why she would want to press her staff to take CDA classes when they would leave for Head Start. The costs are not reimbursed. She is investing in teachers, but then she has to start over and prepare for evaluations with teachers behind on their training. She asked what the incentive is for her to encourage her staff to get the training. Ms. Hill said, while there are no financial incentives, encouraging staff to get training builds teacher experience and increases the number of qualified teachers.

Another provider noted that she paid tuition for her CDA, but that now early childhood teachers can get the training for free. Another provider mentioned that she has encouraged her staff to get their CDA and said scholarships are available.

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

Ms. Boehning said she would like to see more credit given to staff who are “naturals” but lack formal education or certification. She said that a CDA does not mean a better teacher. Allison Wilson said providers would get credit for excellent teachers and that the proposed changes in weighting will count child-teacher interactions more heavily. Ms. Miller clarified that a provider could still be rated 4-star if they were meeting other criteria.

A participant said that the 1-star level is a good idea but said to be sensitive in setting a timeline for moving to the next level. She said moving beyond 1-star may involve very basic requirements for directors and caregivers that take more than 6 months or a year. It would involve overcoming fear due to lack of certain skills, such as computer use or writing, and getting staff to where they are comfortable.

Amy Musick with SMART Family Literacy said that imposing a timeline for improving implies there are consequences for not meeting it. She asked if training offered at no cost to TRS centers by CLI would be available to 1-star providers to help increase their quality. Ms. Hollins-Brown said CLI’s current practice is that the training is open to TRS providers as well as to those who are interested in or becoming TRS. Ms. Musick said her non-profit helps centers understand why they should be TRS.

The registered home provider said that personality clashes with Child Care Licensing leads to writeups. She said that she was threatened with the loss of a star level and that she did not know if she wanted to be in TRS anymore. Ms. Hill noted that HHSC Child Care Licensing is a different agency and said the recommendations include a training and certification course for TRS staff. She said assessors would have to be certified while mentors would take the training. Mentors would get guidance on how to support early learning programs.

A provider asked if all subsidized providers would be required to be 1-star. Ms. Hill said it is not a requirement. A provider said that her center offers after-school, in-school programs and that the hardest part of the TRS process was how to apply the standards to the school environment since they cannot rearrange ISD facilities. She said the process was not set up so that she could get her after-school program to meet the qualifications.

A provider asked what is being done to help with contracts for NCI (sic). They were 3-star for a year before they moved up to TRS 4-star. They secured a contract in December and could not change it when their star level changed. Another provider had a similar concern and said Board staff was unable to find the right paperwork. Ms. Miller advised that child care funds are contracted out to local boards which have child care contractors. She said providers should communicate with the local workforce development board to ensure that they are aware of these challenges. Trudy Ray with the Houston-Galveston Area Council provided her contact information and said the comments provided indicate there could be a systemic problem and that she would see that it is taken care of. She said it is the Board’s charge to ensure that providers are paid timely and correctly. Another Board staff member mentioned that Baker Ripley holds provider meetings where providers can voice their concerns. She recommended elevating concerns to management.

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

Another provider mentioned that she said a revenue drop of \$11,000 per month and believes the funds are going to Houston. Ms. Boehning said there is a waiting list in her area and that parents are putting their kids in Brazos County. Board staff explained that parents choose the provider and that the Board pays the subsidy if the parent is eligible. They noted that funds are not apportioned by county. If it is a parent's turn on the wait list, they will get care wherever they are in the Board area. A provider said that she has attended some of the workforce board meetings but is put off when she calls. Another provider said that they got their rate change this year because they kept protesting; a glitch in the system kept sending them the wrong contract though they had signed the correct one. Board staff acknowledged that glitches occur and said the Board should be able to notify providers ahead of time and that it should not happen often.

Christy Serrano with First 3 Years asked if TWC has calculated the increase in programs if all subsidy programs became TRS. Ms. Miller said 35% of subsidy providers currently are in TRS and that it would be a big job. She noted there would be no additional requirements for providers that move to 1-star. The 1-star would only indicate that provider does not have a multitude of serious licensing violations. There also would be no enhanced reimbursement rate for 1-star providers. Ms. Serrano asked about the cost to the state for the screening tool. Ms. Miller said TWC has linkages with partner agencies and that it is not too expensive to use available data and align it to an automated screening form. She said the workgroup recommendation was that, to grow TRS, more mentors are needed in the field.

Ms. Serrano asked, if the cost is low to get all subsidy providers into TRS, why not make it mandatory? Ms. Miller said that concerns have been raised in West Texas where there are not enough providers to take the kids. Providers in some areas may not be interested in serving subsidized kids, and a required 1-star would be another barrier. It would increase the waiting list in those areas because the supply of providers will have dwindled. She said, while urban areas have a lot of providers and engagement, Boards have asked that TWC work with them to ensure thought is being given to unintended consequences. Ms. Miller said other states have moved to requiring providers to be in the Quality Rating System and that TWC wants to see what happened to the child care supply in those states. Ms. Everitt said the states have seen a dip but that providers see improving their quality as a business opportunity.

A provider said that she has six centers and that the 1-star would just be adding one more thing and be too much. She is worried about the transition. Ms. Everitt noted that the 1-star would only be an indicator that the provider is meeting minimum standards and that TWC is developing this to make it as easy as possible. Ms. Hill reiterated that there would be no additional TRS requirements for the 1-star. It would only be a screening tool that providers could use as a stepping stone to increase their TRS level. She said the screening form sometimes is the biggest hurdle for a provider.

A participant asked about trainers using the Workforce Registry to scan a person's training documentation into their ledger. Ms. Hill said the trainer registry has been part of the Workforce Registry. The goal is to get people and trainers into the registry and to educate trainers on how they can use it to input data on attendees. Statewide implementation will address this so that providers will not

External Relations Notes  
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

have to worry about handing out certificates. Each employee would have their own portfolio online so that they can access their own training information and allow their director to access it as well.

A provider said that she wants more training for her staff, especially on Saturday and Sunday. She said they are limited in how many staff can attend training but that it would help their kids be more educated. Board staff responded that they are looking at webinars and other ways to provide training and that they have 401 TRS providers in their region.

A provider said she is worried that adding to the TRS program will take away her mentor. Ms. Miller said that TWC is investing in more mentors and assessors as the program grows. TWC is also in the process of putting data by Board on the TWC website that will include the number of kids in care and TRS participation from 2014 to present that will show the program growth in TRS and the number of kids served.

Michael Gonzalez suggested that providers sign up to be a host site for Collaborative for Children training and that they use CLI Engage. A provider said she would be interested in group training so she can make sure her employees are there. Mr. Gonzalez noted that a director in good standing can provide training to their own staff. Board staff said trainings can be provided to a provider and other providers can be invited to participate.

A provider criticized the machines used to verify child attendance. Ms. Wilson noted that TWC is in the process of procuring a new vendor that would address concerns about the current machines.

Ms. Boehning said that providers are hurt when parents suspend care, leaving a spot providers cannot fill, and that this especially impacts baby rooms. Private pay parents have to pay whether their kids attend or not. A provider added that she does not get paid when teen parents are out of school for two weeks.

Participants were invited to email written comments to [trs4yearreview@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:trs4yearreview@twc.state.tx.us).