

What is STARS?

STARS stands for the **ST**ep **A**head **R**ecognition System. It is Vermont's system for recognizing and improving quality in:

- Registered child care homes;
- Licensed family child care homes;
- Licensed early childhood programs;
- Licensed school-age care programs;
- Preschool (PreK) programs that receive public education funding;
- Non-recurring child care programs (i.e., child care at ski resorts); and
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

How does it work?

Programs may apply for recognition in five areas:

1. Regulatory history;
2. Staff qualifications;
3. Families and communities;
4. Program practices; and
5. Administration.

Programs can earn up to 5 points in *program practices* and up to 3 points in all other areas, for a total of up to 17 points.

What do the points mean?

Programs are awarded 1 to 5 stars, based on the total number of points earned.

- 1 - 4 points = ★
- 5 - 8 points = ★ ★
- 9 - 11 points = ★ ★ ★
- 12 - 14 points = ★ ★ ★ ★
- 15 - 17 points = ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

One-star programs may be just starting on a path to improvement or may be stronger in one area.

Two-star programs may have made some progress in many areas or more progress in one or two areas.

Three-star programs have either made substantial progress in two or three areas or some improvements in all five.

Four-star programs have documented quality in all five areas. Many are also nationally accredited.

Five-star programs are outstanding in all five areas. Many are also nationally accredited.

Do programs have to participate in STARS?

According to Vermont statute, programs that receive public education funding for preschool age children *must*:

- a. Be nationally accredited;
- b. Have 4 or 5 stars; OR
- c. Have a plan in place to achieve 4 or 5 stars.

While other programs are not required to participate in STARS to become licensed or registered, participation has benefits for both parents and programs.

How does STARS benefit me as a parent?

- STARS can help you find a quality program for your child.
- You may pay less for child care if you receive child care financial assistance AND use a program that has stars. This is because the Child Development Division pays a higher rate to programs with stars. *Note: Financial assistance payments are made directly to providers.*
- You may qualify for a tax credit on your Vermont state income tax if you meet income guidelines AND use a program that has 3, 4, or 5 stars.

How does STARS benefit programs?

Programs that participate in STARS get:

- A higher reimbursement rate from the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (5% to 40% above base rate) based on the number of stars earned.
- Bonus payment for each level achieved ranging from \$250 to \$1,550.
- Help promoting their participation in STARS (e.g., listing on the STARS website, supply of STARS brochures, and a customized press release).
- The opportunity to apply for grants open only to programs that have stars or national accreditation.
- Discounts from some companies.



"STARS builds confidence for you to try something new and to not be afraid."

- Center Director



Who can apply?

All programs registered or licensed with the Child Development Division may apply. However, programs need to be in regulatory compliance before applying.

When should we apply?

You may apply at any time. STARS is meant to begin where you are and help your program improve over time.

How do we apply?

You can either:

- Download a STARS application at dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/stars; or
- Contact the coordinators at (802)398-2037 or STARS@mjccvt.org to request an application by mail.

You may apply for recognition in five areas: regulatory history; staff qualifications; families & communities; program practices; and administration.

Certificates are good for three years. An annual report is required.

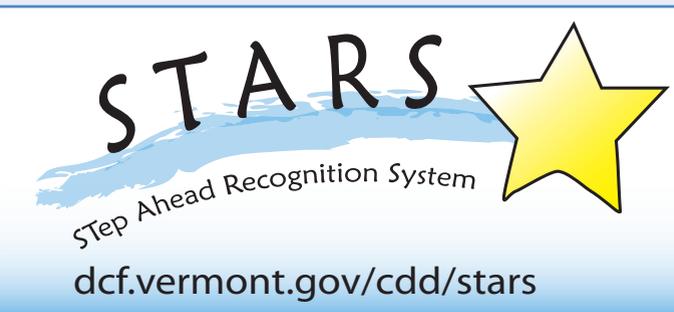
What if my program is accredited?

There is a streamlined application for:

- Nationally accredited programs. These programs have already gone through an accreditation process and earned an accreditation certificate.
- Head Start programs that are in high compliance with national Head Start performance standards.

Is help available?

Yes. Technical assistance is available. Contact a STARS coordinator at (802) 398-2037 or STARS@mjccvt.org. The coordinator can explain how the program works and what you need to include with your application. You'll continue to have access to technical assistance after you have achieved a star level.



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"This is a wonderful way for providers to get recognized for their commitment in the field."

- Registered Provider

How can STARS help me find a program?

Choosing the right program for your child is one of the most important decisions you'll face as a parent. STARS can help!

STARS can make it easier for you to find a quality program for your child. STARS recognized programs have demonstrated their commitment to quality care and education. The more stars a program has, the more involved it is in a wide range of practices that support children, families, and professionals.

How do I find STARS programs?

Go to dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/stars or call the Child Development Division (CDD) at 1-800-649-2642.



STARS
*Information for
Parents & Programs*

