

External Relations Notes
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

February 25, 2020 – Lubbock

TWC Child Care and Early Learning staff hosted a regional stakeholder meeting in Lubbock on Tuesday, February 25, 2020.

Lindsay Hill provided an overview of the Texas Rising Star (TRS) 4-year review process and the workgroup's recommendations which are summarized at <https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/trs-4-yr-review-recommendations-twc.pdf>. She said that the TWC Commissioners will consider the workgroup's recommendations as well as stakeholder input before making decisions and that some recommendations may need more discussion by the workgroup or TWC. The attendees were invited to share comments or ask questions.

Commenting on a recommendation to establish a TRS 1-star level focused on licensing compliance with a long-term goal for all subsidy providers to be TRS, Brooks Jones with Christian Preschool Centers Inc. said that providers should not have to be a 1-star when there would be no financial benefit.

Regarding a recommendation to lessen the impact of licensing deficiencies by allowing for a probationary period on the first occurrence instead of dropping a star level, Kassie Camargo with Christian Preschool Centers Inc. asked whether there would be a change in reimbursement during the probationary period. Ms. Hill said that, currently, a level 1 (critical) deficiency would impact a provider's star level, resulting in a change in the reimbursement rate. Under the recommendation, the reimbursement rate would not change for providers placed on probation. The six-month probationary period would allow the provider time to correct the issues. A second occurrence would result in a star level drop.

Mr. Jones asked how providers with 10 to 15 citations would be impacted. He said that providers sometimes get bombarded by HHSC Child Care Licensing (CCL) and that providers should have a 3-month grace period. Ms. Hill said that currently, a provider would not be able to stay TRS if they receive additional citations within 6 months. She said that, under the change, providers could not have more than two consecutive probationary periods and that they would lose a star level at the second probation. A third probation would result in being dropped from TRS altogether, and providers could not be TRS if they had more than four probations total within 3 years. She said that TRS looks at a providers most recent 12 months of history. Ms. Hill mentioned that the TRS workgroup also recommended more cross training with CCL and TRS staff and that plans are to implement this in the fall. She said CCL Regional Directors have been outreaching Boards about supports and possible collaborations. She said there has been a lot of discussion about how TWC and HHSC CCL can work better together but noted that HHSC CCL is a separate agency and that their focus is regulatory while TWC is focused on quality.

Another provider asked why deficiencies cannot come off a provider's record once CCL has cleared the provider. Ms. Hill explained that the first TRS workgroup created the screening form in 2014 and felt that it was important to keep that information, though it can be marked by CCL as "compliant or corrected." Reagan Miller added that the current workgroup recommendations would remove one

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critical deficiency relating to director training from the screening form. Others were kept due to the risk to the health and safety of children. However, rather than penalizing a provider immediately, the workgroup recommended allowing time to correct the issue so that there were not be a direct financial penalty.

Mr. Jones reiterated his suggestion that providers be given a grace period on CCL deficiencies after the initial 6-month probation. Ms. Hill said that a mentor should see continued CCL challenges as an indication that a provider needs assistance, such as, if a provider is incurring violations due to issues with files, the mentor could take a day to help the provider fix that issue.

Mr. Jones asked what constitutes a second probation. Ms. Miller said that, if a provider had 14 violations leading to the first probation that were all corrected on probation but go 6 additional violations while on probation, that could lead to a second probation. Mr. Jones suggested that a higher number of violations should trigger a second probation. He said that participating in TRS is a choice for providers but that they live and breathe by CCL; his program is currently having problems with shot records. Another provider mentioned concerns with the experience or attitudes of CCL staff. Board staff said that, if a provider is on probation, their mentor could work with them to prevent a repeat occurrence. Ms. Hill said that addressing licensing issues would be infused with a provider's continuous quality improvement plan (CQIP), which is another workgroup recommendation.

A provider commented, if a provider has a pattern of deficiencies, time should be allowed for a mentor to help the provider. Allison Wilson said that TWC is looking to automate the screening process for the TRS 1-star level and that it also could assist mentors to be proactive when deficiencies are about to trigger probation or already have. Board staff noted that a file deficiency can lead to multiple citations and that TRS could ding the provider once for these types of violations instead of for each citation.

Providers asked Child Care and Early Learning staff to expand on the workgroup recommendation to require TRS providers to use the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS), the workforce registry. Providers expressed concern about being required to use TECPDS and being held accountable should individual staff refuse to use it. Providers also were concerned that each individual employee would have to grant their employer access to their records in TECPDS. Another provider was concerned about what control directors have to deactivate staff linked to her program after they leave her employment. A provider said that, though TECPDS is a free system, some providers might choose to use another system, so they would be having to enter the information twice. They also are concerned that CCL might decide to use another system.

Ms. Hill explain the workforce registry is based on the individual. The recommendation was to require programs to enroll. A mentor should visit the program with a machine they would use to meet with staff to assist with enrolling the director and staff into TECPDS. Only training for the current and previous year would be required along with documentation of the individual's education. Individuals can choose to include older training information. The idea was to use TECPDS to help score a program's Category 1: Director and Staff Qualifications instead of going through paper files. The information would all be online and allow individual reports to be pulled. Programs would need to be enrolled on

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recertification. Child Care and Early Learning staff are looking at how the requirements would work in relation to staff that refuse to enroll. Ms. Hill said it would be a benefit to individual staff to have an online portfolio from which they can print out a report of their training history. She said it also prevents possible data loss in the event that paper documentation is lost or destroyed. Ms. Hill said that CCL is looking at using the registry as well. She mentioned that there will be meetings on TECPDS as it is rolled out statewide. She said the requirement to use the system would be an application eligibility component for a provider's CQIP rather than a compliance component. Providers would not be scored or assessed on the use of TECPDS and would not lose a star level due to employees refusing to use it. Ms. Hill emphasized that there will be supports for TECPDS and that Boards will be encouraged to determine how best to help programs with the system.

Ms. Wilson said that the statewide TECPDS rollout event on May 14 will help Board staff understand their roll in assisting providers. She said there will be another evening session where providers will be trained by the people who designed the TECPDS system.

Providers were concerned that they would still be required to keep paper records. Ms. Hill confirmed that providers would need to maintain paper documentation until CCL moves to using an online format. Ms. Miller said that CCL is very interested in the TECPDS system.

Mr. Jones asked for clarification regarding the recommendation to split group size and ratio into two point-based measures. Ms. Hill said that, currently, group size and ratio are one measure, but both are scored. The lower score of the two is given. The workgroup determined that they should be split since they are both scored and because both are integral to quality. She explained that these measures would be based on attendance the day of the assessment visit.

Carrie Altman with South Plains Community Action, the local Head Start agency, asked whether Head Start and Early Head Start would have to be part of the subsidized child care program in order to participate in TRS. She noted that federal guidelines require Head Start programs to participate in state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), if available. Ms. Miller said, under Texas statute, having an agreement to provide subsidized child care is a requirement for TRS. She said most Head Start programs that participate in TRS provide wraparound care.

Alicia Syverson and Lilia Nanez with Ector County ISD said that the school district in Odessa is interested in partnering with local child care providers to provide services for 3-year-olds but has not been able to find any providers that are interested. They traveled to the TRS stakeholder meeting in Lubbock to hear from child care providers. The district is looking to serve up to 1,000 eligible children in a half-day program. Ms. Miller mentioned that a Pre-K Partnership Summit is coming and that the 3-year-old group is ideal for partnerships because these children still qualify for full-day subsidy. Mr. Jones mentioned that he is reaching out to his local ISD about the possibility of a partnership, but he does not understand how the funding would work to pay a certified teacher which he cannot afford with the current subsidy. Ms. Miller said that it would depend on the model and TWC is working to roll out a Pre-K partnership calculator to help providers, Boards and school districts understand how the funding would work based on the individual program design.

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Another provider said that school districts are being dinged for not having a 3-year-old program, so they are looking at taking these kids. Ector County ISD staff stressed that their district wants to partner with private providers rather than expend tax dollars on new facilities. A provider commented that they would love to partner with a school district, but there are so many questions and obstacles. They noted that their program does not offer the insurance and other benefits that teachers want, even if the pay is there. South Plains Workforce Board staff said that they would learn more about how to make partnerships work.

Ms. Miller mentioned that the Child Care and Early Learning Division has developed a webpage on Pre-K Partnerships. This site can be accessed at <https://twc.texas.gov/programs/twc-prekindergarten-partnerships>. Shay Everitt is TWC's Senior Advisor for Child Care/Pre-K Partnerships. Those interested in receiving updates can enter their email address on TWC's homepage at <https://twc.texas.gov/> and select "Pre-K Partnerships" from the list of options. The Pre-K Partnership Summit will take place March 30-31.

Ms. Miller explained that the TRS workgroup's recommendation to add a TRS 1-star level for programs participating in the child care subsidy program. She said that a third of child care programs are quality; the rest are not. Programs can have many licensing violations and still receive a subsidy while caring for children. She said that the workgroup discussed the possibility of establishing a base TRS level for providers that pass the screening form with a long-term goal that everyone would need to meet this base level to receive a subsidy. She said it has been discussed that perhaps it should not be assigned a star level but something else to indicate that the program is meeting licensing standards. She said the workgroup discussed a possible long-range goal of requiring all subsidy providers to have at least a 2-star level. She said Ohio took 8 years to get to a mandatory QRIS. She said there is concern about supply if providers do not want to participate.

Mr. Jones said that he has five schools that are not receiving any government assistance. He considered adding one but determined that it was not worth it. He said a program has to be open a year before they can apply for TRS and that the time from application to assessment is too long. Another provider expressed concern about the possible impact of the proposed probationary period for TRS providers that have incurred a licensing deficiency on the availability of mentors. She said her mentor is already stretched and that they would be more so if multiple providers are on probation and in need of mentoring. A provider mentioned that they had started their TRS application in January and will not be assessed until the end of May because the Board does not have the resources. Mr. Jones asked what would happen with the addition of the 1-star level.

Ms. Hill said the TRS workgroup considered a proposal to centralize the assessor function with the idea that Boards would then have more resources for mentors. Ms. Miller said this would involve a competitive procurement for a statewide contract for an entity, such as a university, to provide the assessment service. She said this could provide more consistency.

Mr. Jones expressed concern that there could be a disconnect between mentors and assessors; currently, programs rely on mentors to provide guidance on what the assessors will be looking for. Ms.

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Hill said the recommendations also include a training course for mentors and assessors and certification for assessors to ensure assessors are scoring providers the same way. Ms. Miller said that mentors and assessors would continue to work together. Ms. Hill said there would be collaboration but that some of it could be virtual; mentors and assessors most likely would not office together. Mr. Jones suggested there should be an appeal process for TRS assessments due to variation in how quality can be interpreted.

A provider asked if there has been any discussion about raising reimbursement rates. Ms. Miller said there was a large increase in rates two years ago and that rates were re-benchmarked in the past year after a new market rate survey. She said TWC continually watches market rates and adjusts rates incrementally year to year and works with Boards on how they prioritize their 2% quality funds. She said federal funding increases have led to increases in Board allocations and the amount of funding they have available for quality.

A provider asked if any thought had been given to allowing providers to have additional holidays to scan records or for training. Mr. Jones said that it is a best practice to pay for professional development days. Ms. Hill said that Boards determine the number of holidays.

Manda Klein with Teachstone said that her organization advocates working to improve QRIS and that they are looking for ways to bring their knowledge and research with QRIS around the country.

Ector County ISD staff said that they have heard the providers' challenges but that they are looking for feedback on the idea of partnering with a school district. They mentioned the challenges of Odessa's petroleum-based economy with its housing shortage and teacher vacancies. The school district is having difficulty communicating the benefit to local providers to be TRS because all their slots are full. Parents do not understand the importance of high-quality child care, but 67% of children entering kindergarten there are not ready. The school district is maxed out for capacity and is praying that a provider will come forward. The district has a collective partnership with the Education Partnership of the Permian Basin and the Early Childhood Network and are leveraging a Collective Impact model. However, when they contacted 50 child care programs in Odessa, only four showed remote interest because their seats are already filled, and they can charge higher rates. District staff met with a Workforce Solutions representative, but they need TWC to help them gather the providers.

Ms. Miller said that Odessa is an example of the concern about the child care supply and that she hopes to meet with the Board to discuss how to get providers into TRS and the potential to build business interest on the importance of building tomorrow's workforce.

A provider suggested asking a parent of a child who was served by a TRS provider to share what the child gained. They said they are educating the child and also the parents on the importance of implementing strategies in their household. Ector County ISD staff said that they are going through the process of educating the community and parents on the importance of kindergarten readiness and what families should expect for the \$1,200 they are paying but that they need buy-in from providers. A provider said the biggest struggle is financial and that there are not many incentives to join; providers need to be convinced of the importance of quality. Mr. Jones commented that some providers think

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they are already quality and that they do not need TRS. A provider mentioned that some parents enroll their children without ever seeing the center.

Ms. Miller said that the TRS workgroup recommended a campaign to educate families and providers about TRS. She said TWC is working with the Texas Education Agency on data connection that will facilitate outcomes data to show the impact of quality on kindergarten readiness and beyond. She said providers also need information on resources available to help them become TRS.

Ms. Hill encouraged the attendees to email comments and suggestions to trs4yearreview@twc.state.tx.us .