STARS ANNUAL REPORT
Fiscal Year 2018

This report reflects activity during the State of Vermont Fiscal Year:
July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018.

Fiscal Year 2018 Highlights

Vermont's STep Ahead Recognition System has completed its fourteenth year as an agent for engaging early childhood and school age programs in achieving standards that are associated with better outcomes for children, families and the professionals who work with them.

After completing a Results Based Accountability framework in 2017 and working with the STARS Oversight Committee to identify goals, this fiscal year the STARS office implemented practices and tools intended to improve providers experience with STARS: from completing the application, to getting questions answered, to requesting an assessment. It also began collaborations with the Child Development Division and the Agency of Education to verify STARS information used during the Universal Pre-K prequalification process.

In response to feedback from public school preschool programs, a new STARS application was implemented in January 2018 that streamlined two of the STARS arenas: the Staff Qualifications Arena and the Administration Arena. Because the systems already in place at public schools enable these programs to consistently meet certain point thresholds, public school preschool programs can now receive points automatically in the Staff Qualifications Arena and Administration Arena without any additional documentation. This alleviates some of the paperwork and time spent on the application, both of which were criticisms voiced by public school preschool programs.

The STARS office has also received feedback, both on the phone and during its September 2017 survey, that providers feel the STARS process can be overwhelming and complex. Much of the day is spent providing technical assistance to providers on the phone and via email, and in an effort to identify common areas of confusion, the office began collecting data about the types of technical assistance it provides. Although still a work in progress, the office has started identifying common questions that will be addressed by revising the Frequently Asked Questions portion of the Child Development Division website, fine-tuning applications when next appropriate, and including information in future STARS Newsletters.

The Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and CLASS assessment process for STARS, utilized as part of the Program Practices Arena for early childhood programs, has evolved over the course of the last fiscal year. An increased interest on the part of providers in using CLASS prompted a revision of the STARS application to better incorporate the assessment tool. Providers who have previously met certain benchmarks using the ERS assessment now have the option to use CLASS, and during FY2018, 15 CLASS assessments were performed, an increase of 87% over FY2017, when only 2 assessments were completed.

In addition, two new full-time STARS assessors, Ann Dillenbeck and Tierney O'Meara, were hired and trained to reliability using the ERS in the winter of 2018, bringing the full-time assessor total to three. An increased demand for ERS assessments to meet Universal Pre-K requirements necessitated the hiring of an additional assessor, as did the departure of a seasoned assessor in January 2018.

This past fiscal year was also marked by new collaborations between the STARS office, the Child Development Division (CDD), and the Agency of Education (AOE) to support programs efforts to meet Universal Pre-K requirements. Since August 2017, the STARS Coordinator has reviewed and verified information on 61 STARS Plan applications, which are the plans that programs develop outlining how they will meet required program quality standards. Additionally, the STARS Coordinator has verified the STARS information on Universal Pre-K Applications since April 2018.

During FY2018, the STARS Coordinator attended a number of events as part of ongoing outreach efforts. These included:

- VTAEYC Board meetings and VTAEYC Conference
- National QRIS Conference
- Starting Points Leader Meetings
- STARS Evaluation Arena Workgroups
- Public School Operated crosswalk and streamline workgroups

She also participates in Director Credential Portfolio Review and on the following standing committees:

- STARS oversight
- STARS validation and evaluation
- MATCH
- Streamline
- PPD

Respectfully Submitted:
Johanna Vaczy and Elizabeth Kervick
STARS Coordinator and STARS Office Coordinator

SECTION 1: Participation

The number of programs in STARS has decreased slightly since the previous year, and appears tied to the overall reduction in the number of childcare providers in the state. The percentage of programs participating in STARS, however, continues to remain steady.

Fiscal Year 2018	**Fiscal Year 2017**
975 programs in STARS	1003 programs in STARS
1256 regulated programs	1306 regulated programs
78% of regulated programs in STARS	**77%** of regulated programs in STARS

Chart 1: Percentage of programs in STARS from 2012–2018

% of programs in STARS, 2012-2018
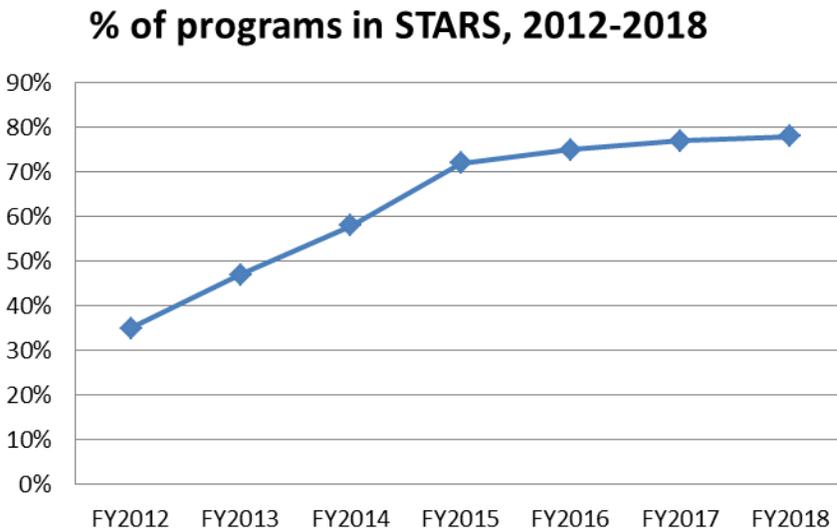
Chart 2: Total programs in STARS by type

STARS programs by type
■ FY 2016 ■ FY2017 ■ FY2018

Registered Homes: 550, 466, 430
Licensed Programs: 442, 443, 449
School Age Programs: 69, 79, 78
Licensed Homes: 14, 15, 17

Please note: Licensed early childhood programs with Act 62 or Act 166 partnerships are not shown separately on this chart. They are included in the licensed early childhood category.
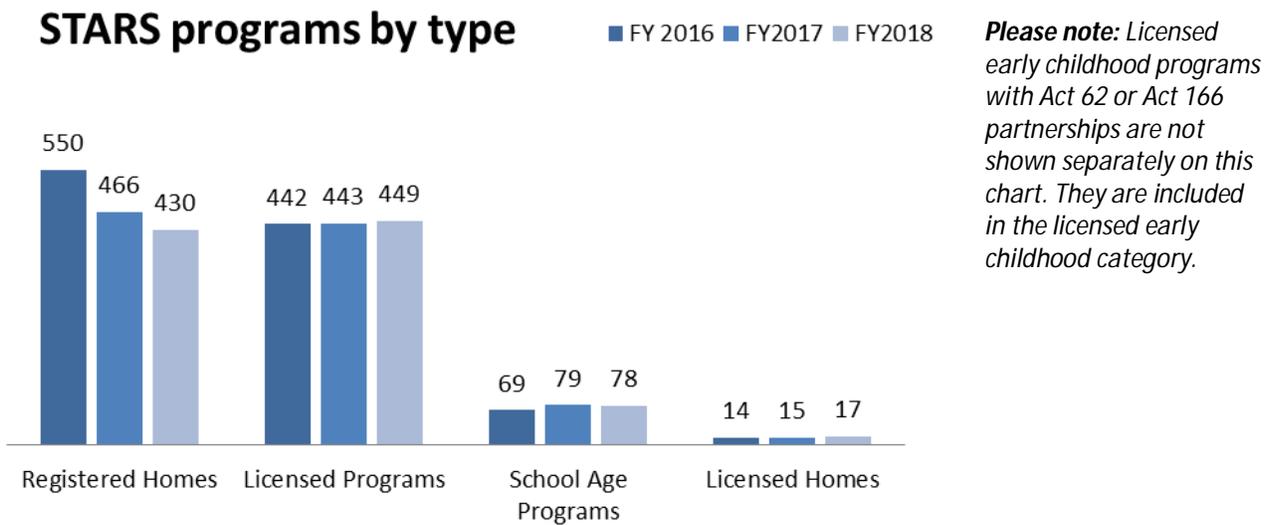
The chart above shows STARS participation by program type for the last three fiscal years. Although the number of Registered Family Child Care programs in STARS has continued to drop, the percentage of Registered Family Child Care programs in STARS is actually 2% higher than last fiscal year (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of regulated programs in STARS, by type

	Total in STARS	Total in state	% of total	% change since FY2017
Registered Family Child Care Programs	430	564	76%	↑2%
Licensed Early Childhood Programs	449	512	88%	0%
School Age Programs	78	160	49%	↓5%
Licensed Homes	17	20	85%	↑6%

Programs that end their participation in STARS

There are two primary reasons that programs become "Not Rated" in STARS: they close their child care program, or they do not submit the required STARS paperwork. The STARS office is not privy to all of the reasons programs close their program, but some of the reasons given include retirement, finding a different job, feeling like it was "too much" for one person to manage, low enrollment, district reorganization, and budget constraints. Many of the programs that do not submit their STARS paperwork do so because they have made a decision not to continue operating their child care program. In other cases, they report that time just got away from them. We estimate that annually approximately 20 programs reenter the STARS system after not submitting their paperwork.

During the last fiscal year the STARS office began to collect data about why programs end their participation in STARS by sending a short survey. Only had handful of programs have responded so far, but the hope is that the information gathered will inform our work and help develop a system of support for the field.

SECTION 2: Assessments

Three types of assessment tools are used by STARS to assess programs as part of the Program Practices Arena: The Environment Rating Scale (ERS), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA).

ERS Observations

The Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessment process experienced two major hurdles in the past fiscal year: a significant increase in assessment requests and the departure of a seasoned STARS assessor. Compared to FY2017 when 125 programs requested assessments, FY2018 saw 172 programs request assessments, which is a 38% increase. The comparison with FY2016 is even more telling; there was a 65% increase in the number of programs requesting assessments in FY2018 as compared to FY2016.

ERS Assessment Totals, 2016-2018
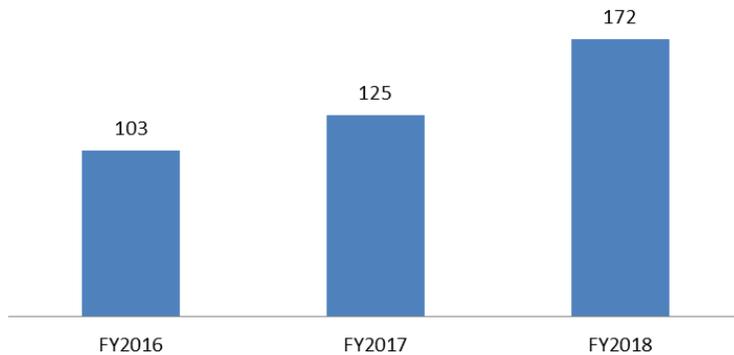
The additional demand for assessments can be attributed primarily to:

- Increased Universal Pre-K qualification monitoring on the part of the CDD
- A change to the scoring in the Staff Qualifications Arena of STARS

The pressure placed on the system by the two changes noted above, combined with the loss of an assessor in January 2018, resulted in extensive wait times for some programs. Additional assessors were hired on a contract basis to help alleviate the burden on the full-time assessors, but many programs still experienced long wait times.

The STARS office has responded to the increased demand for ERS assessments by hiring a third full-time STARS assessor, implementing a shared google spreadsheet to better track assessment requests, and communicating with affected programs to inform them of the situation and to address any concerns related to the STARS process. With the understanding that this has been a rocky year for programs requesting assessments, the office also recently surveyed 199 programs to get their feedback on the process. Information on the results of the survey can be found in the Appendix, and will be used to address provider concerns and to improve the assessment process.

ERS Assessment Totals for FY2018 by Program Type

Program Type	Total Number of ERS Assessments	Scored Assessments	Unscored Assessments
Home Providers	52	13	39
Licensed Centers	119	85	34
School Age Programs	1	1	0
TOTAL	**172**	**99**	**73**

Note: The total number of assessments performed can be misleading in terms of the actual work on the part of the assessors. For a scored ERS assessment of a program with 6 classrooms, an assessor typically visits each classroom for 3 hours in the morning, which requires 6 days of observations at the program. Depending on the location of the program it can also include hours of driving, followed by many hours of scoring and report writing, and yet this is counted as only 1 scored ERS Assessment on our table. Going forward, the STARS Office will begin tracking the number of classroom observations at each program to better represent the time spent by the STARS Assessors.

ERS Score Descriptions

Inadequate		Minimal		Good		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Average Subscale Scores
Averages are derived from programs assessed between July 2015 and August 2018.

Subscale	Average Score of 204 ECERS assessments (7.0 max)	Average Score of 124 ITERS assessments (7.0 max)	Average Score of 25 FCCERS assessments (7.0 max)
Space & Furnishings	4.41	4.16	4.92
Personal Care Routines	2.75	2.51	2.84
Language/Listening	5.62	4.98	5.75
Activities	4.60	3.94	4.60
Interaction	5.55	4.70	5.57
Program Structure	5.04	4.48	5.65
Parents & Staff	4.23	5.78	5.97

ECERS = Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale

ITERS = Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale

FCCERS = Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale

The average subscale scores give a general sense of how programs are scoring on their ERS assessments, but it is the intent of the STARS office and STARS Assessors to dive deeper into the data in order to provide specifics about why programs are scoring below 5.0 or "Good." This information will be compiled in a report that will be shared with providers, stakeholders and other interested parties.

YPQA Observations

The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) was administered at nine afterschool programs during FY2018, which equates to 12% of afterschool programs participating in STARS. It is likely that many of the afterschool programs in STARS use the YPQA in their program, but do not use a STARS Assessor and therefore do not use it to earn STARS points.

CLASS Observations

15 STARS programs received CLASS observations during FY2018, which is an 87% increase over FY 2017, when only 2 assessments were performed. All of the programs assessed were licensed early childhood programs. The 7 programs assessed prior to January 2018 received scored CLASS observations, and those assessed after, with the exception of one, received unscored observations. As of January 2018, it became practice for programs using CLASS for the first time to start with an unscored observation, in order to become more familiar with the tool.

Program Satisfaction with Assessment Process

In our September 2018 survey (see Appendix), 71% of programs that received assessments since June 2017 reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the process, and 75% of the programs said they felt the process was timely. These percentages were higher than anticipated, and a reminder to the STARS office that the challenges faced by some programs during the assessment were not universal. The feedback from the survey will be used to fine tune the assessment process and the information provided to programs.
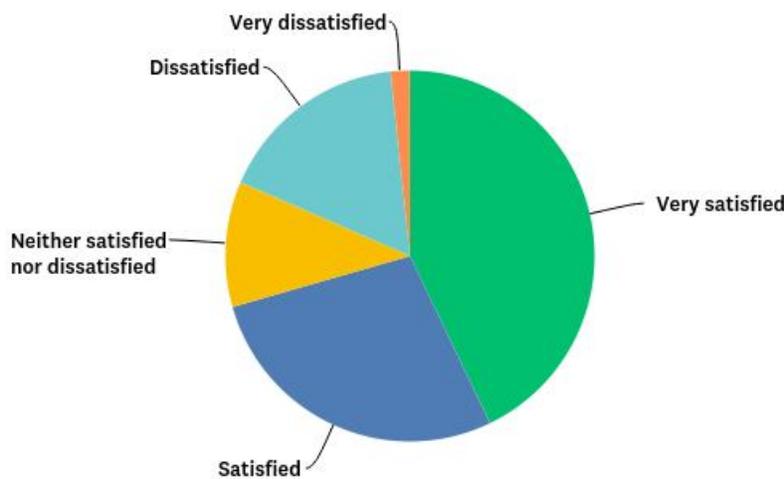
Respondents (119):

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
43% (51)	**28%** (33)	**11%** (13)	**17%** (20)	**2%** (2)

SECTION 3: Quality Achievement and Growth

As part of the STARS office's efforts to provide a path for continuous quality improvement, we offer daily technical assistance, training for programs that request it, and we validate incentives for maintaining and improving quality.

Technical support

STARS Coordinators provide technical support on an ongoing basis to providers as they begin the STARS process or implement their plans to move to higher star levels. This is done by phone, through email, face to face meetings and workshop sessions. During FY2018 the STARS office began to collect data about the types of technical support it provides, in an effort to identify common questions and areas of confusion. This work will be continued in the upcoming year, and the results will be used to better inform providers on the applications and to make clarifications via the Frequently Asked Questions on the CDD website.

STARS Workshops

During the past fiscal year there was a slight increase in the number of requests for the STARS Coordinator to provide information and updates at Starting Points meetings. This is likely because of the shift in VB5 mentoring support and the revisions to the professional development system.

Quality Maintenance, Nutritious Snacks and Meals, and STARS bonus payments

831 Quality Maintenance and/or Nutritious Snacks and Meals Payment invoices were sent to the Child Development Division in FY2018. Through February 2018 they were sent every two weeks, and starting in March the invoices were sent weekly. STARS bonus payments, which programs receive for achieving a new star level, were also sent with the same frequency. 204 STARS bonus payments were processed by the STARS office in FY2018.

STAR Level Increases

When measuring how well we provided technical assistance and training for continuous quality improvement, it also seems pertinent to look at the number of programs that increased their star level. In FY2018, 154 programs already participating in STARS increased their star level, which is 16% of all programs participating in STARS. The chart on the following page shows the change in the number of programs at each star level for the last four fiscal years.

Chart 3: Number of programs at each star level from FY 2015 to FY 2018
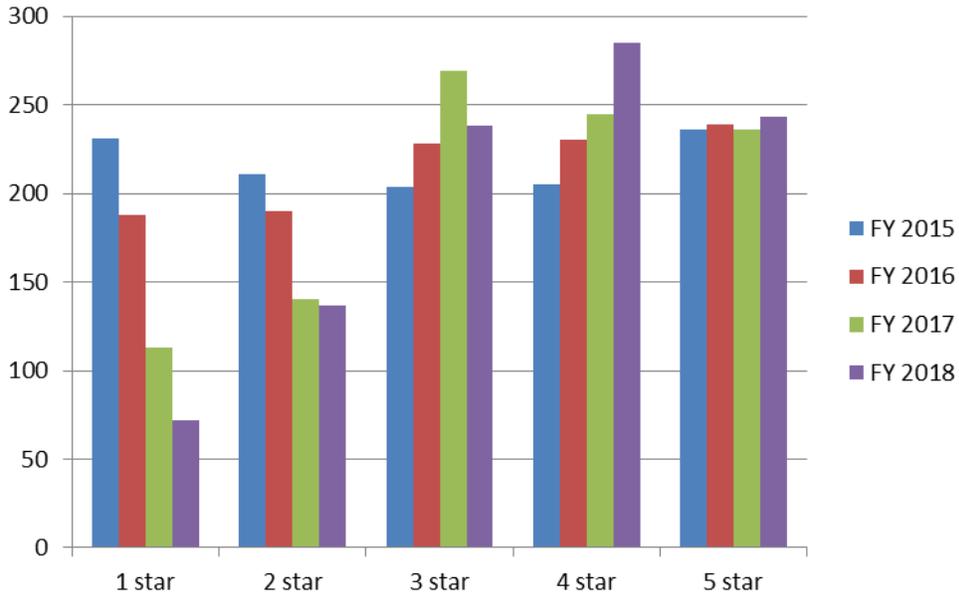
STARS Assessment Survey

The survey was sent to 199 programs that received assessments between June 2017 and August 2018. Of those 199, 121 programs responded, which is a 61% response rate. The majority of respondents had received an ERS assessment, which is logical given that this is the most commonly requested type of assessment.

Overall, 71% of programs surveyed indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the assessment process, and all of the respondents who received CLASS or PQA assessments indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the process. Of those programs who were dissatisfied with the process, the primary reason given was a dislike of the ERS assessment tool.

Despite the assessment scheduling challenges of the last fiscal year, 75% of programs said they felt the process was timely. At the same time, 51% of the programs said they think the process, from start to finish, should take less than one month. The process typically takes, on average, 2-3 months.

87% of programs are satisfied or very satisfied with the information they receive about what to expect on the day of the assessment, which means that for the most part, the emails that are sent out in advance of the assessment are setting programs' expectations appropriately.

69% of programs feel that the feedback they received from the assessor was very helpful or extremely helpful in creating a program improvement plan. Many programs indicated that funding, training for teachers, and additional materials would help support their program improvement.

This data, along with the suggestions and comments made by programs, will be reviewed by the STARS office and STARS Assessors and used to make improvements to the assessment process.

1. What type of assessment did you have?
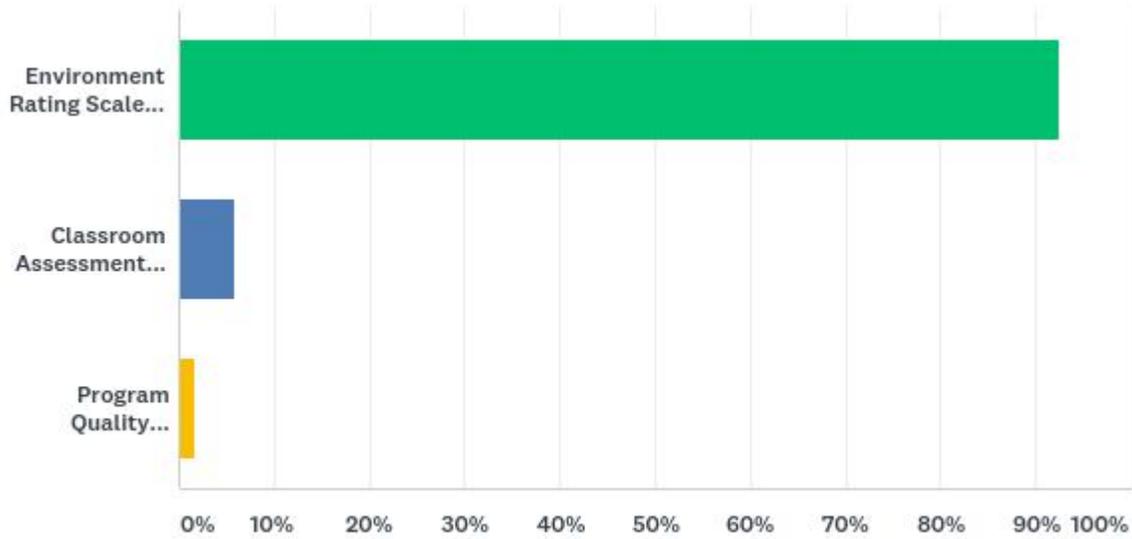
| Environment Rating Scale (ECERS, ITERS, FCCERS, SACERS)	Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)	Program Quality Assessmnt (YPQA, SAPQA)
92% (110)	**6%** (7)	**2%** (2)

2. Was your assessment scored? (ie: Did you receive a numerical score with your written feedback?)
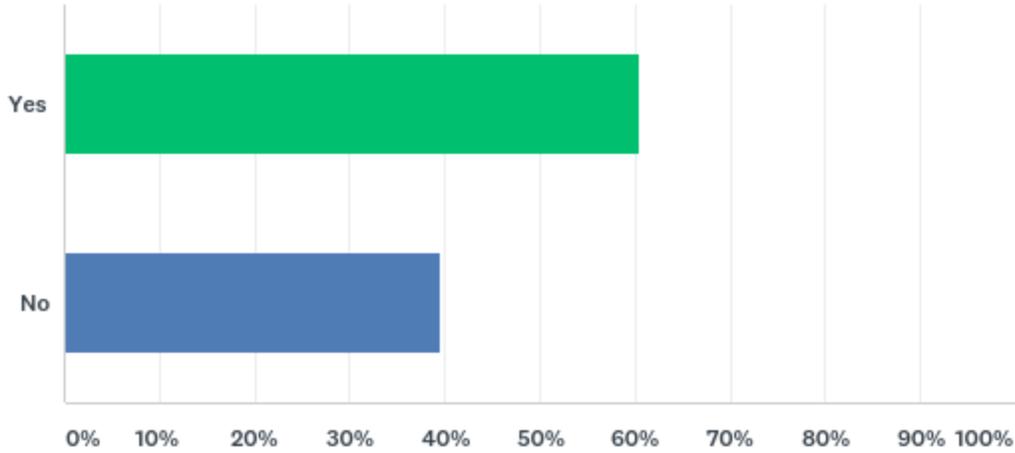
Respondents (119):

| Yes	No
60.5% (72)	**39.5%** (47)

3. Overall, how satisfied were you with the assessment process?
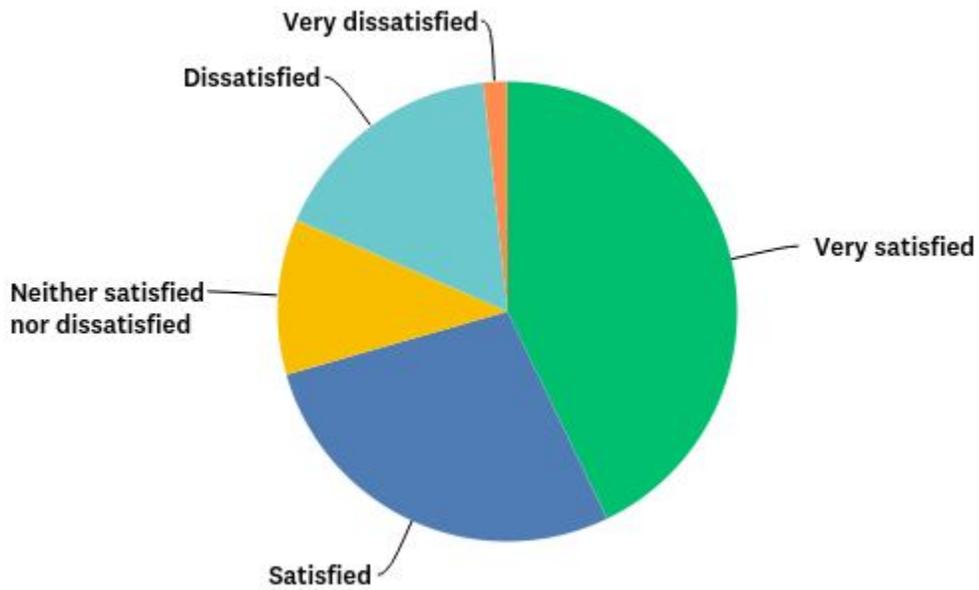
Respondents (119):

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
43% (51)	**28%** (33)	**11%** (13)	**17%** (20)	**2%** (2)

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4. If you were dissatisfied with the process, what was the primary reason?

Assessment process took too long

Didn't like the observation (please explain below)

Didn't like the assessment tool

**Didn't think the process was worthwhile**
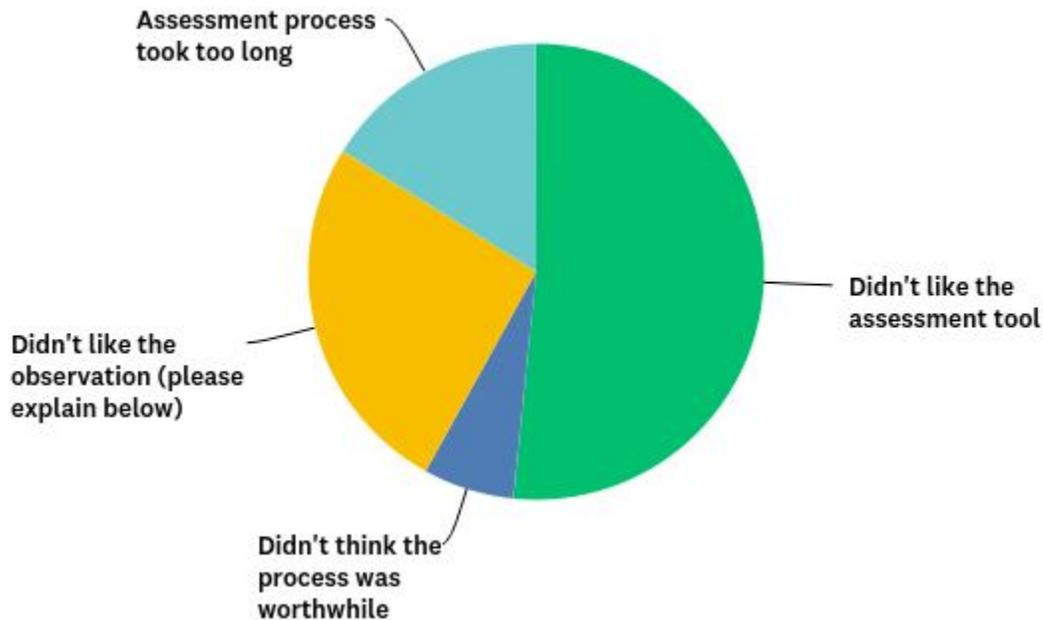
Respondents (31):

Didn't like the assessment tool	Didn't like the observation	Assessment process took too long	Didn't think the process was worthwhile
52% (16)	**26%** (8)	**16%** (5)	**6%** (2)

Only programs who had ERS assessments indicated on the survey that they were dissatisfied with the process. Here are some of the reasons given for their dissatisfaction, in order of how frequently the comments were made:

- Didn't like what the assessment evaluated/felt portions of tool are "unfair"
- Process took too long
- Assessor missed info/assessor didn't ask questions of correct person
- Does not think ERS score accurately reflects "quality"
- Assessor wasn't able to get the "full picture" of the program
- No opportunity to refute scores and feedback
- Not appropriate assessment tool for public school program, home program
- STARS should be using ECERS-3

5. **Did you feel the assessment process (from start to finish), was timely?**
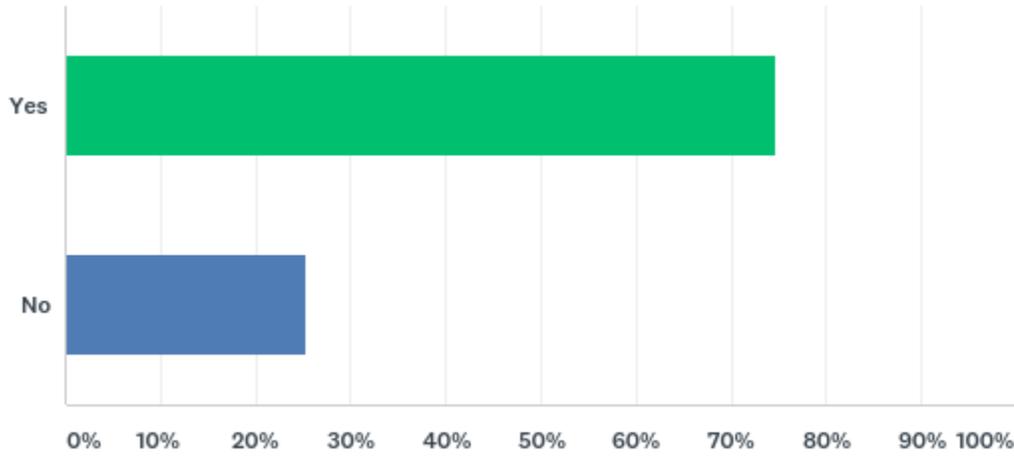
Respondents (119):

| Yes	No
75% (89)	**25%** (30)

6. If you did not feel the process was timely, how long do you think the process should take? (From submitting the assessment request form to receiving written feedback from the assessor.)
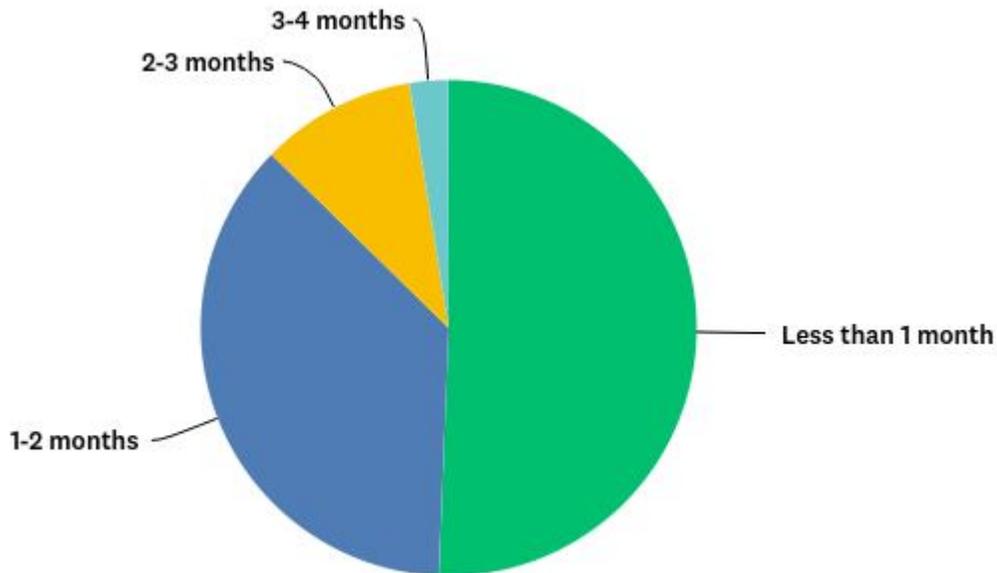
Respondents (79):

| Less than 1 month	1-2 months	2-3 months	3-4 months
51% (40)	**37%** (29)	**10%** (8)	**2%** (2)

7. How satisfied were you with the information you received about what to expect on the day(s) of your assessment? (e.g. assessor's arrival time, length of visit, etc.)
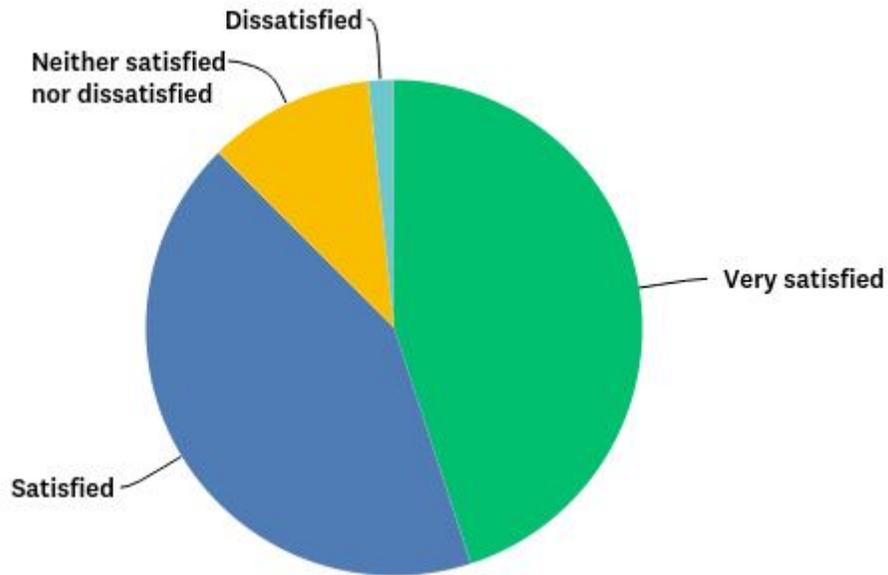
Respondents (120):

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
45% (54)	**42%** (51)	**11%** (13)	**2%** (2)	**0%** (0)

8. Please check any resources you accessed prior to your assessment.
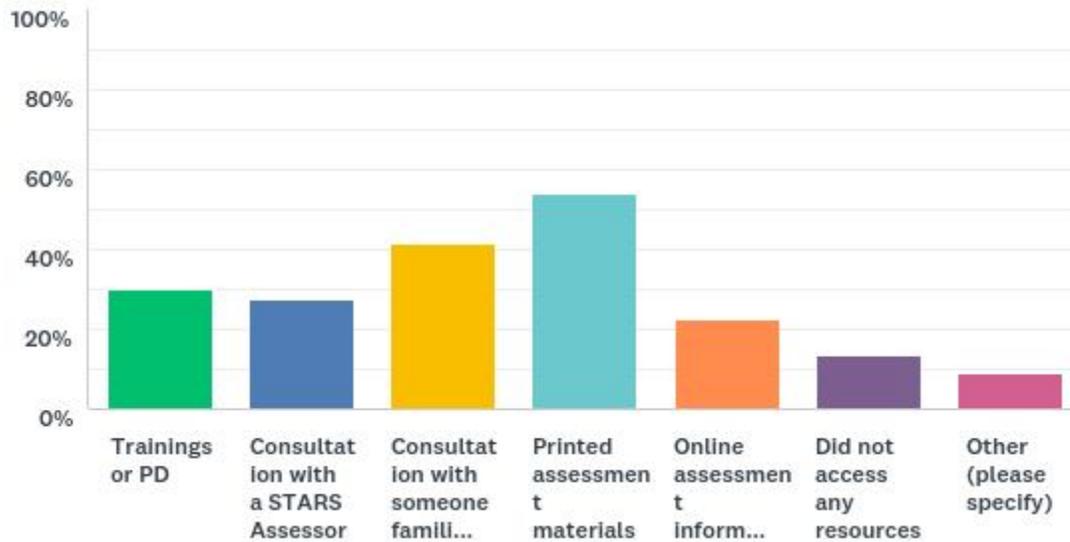
Respondents (120)

Trainings or professional development	**30%** (36)
Consultation with a STARS Assessor	**27.5%** (33)
Consultation with someone familiar with the assessment tool	**42%** (50)
Printed assessment materials	**54%** (65)
Online assessment information	**22.5%** (27)
Did not access any resources	**13%** (16)
Other	**9%** (11)

9. How helpful was the written feedback you received from the assessor in creating a program improvement plan?
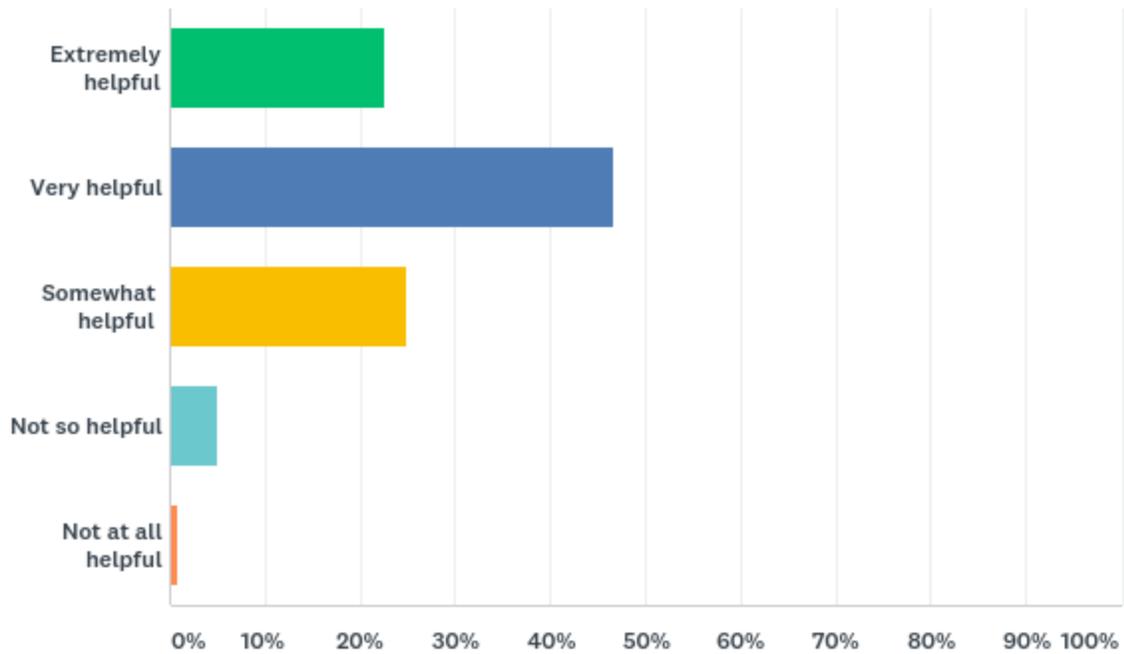
Respondents (120):

Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not so helpful	Not at all helpful
22.5% (27)	**46.5%** (56)	**25%** (30)	**5%** (6)	**1%** (1)

10.   What would help support your program improvement, as it relates to your assessment feedback?

Repeated comments, in order of frequency:

- Funding
- Trainings for teachers
- Additional materials
- More details/clarification
- Follow-up visit by assessor
- Faster receipt of scores/feedback
- Time
- Align assessments and expectations with public schools
- Mentoring

A sampling of comments:

"The assessment tool can be difficult and hard to explain to staff who have never used it. There should be more trainings offered so new staff can be trained."

"Wish there was grant money after you have an assessment done to help you gain better materials and or improve in the areas you need to work on."

"Please consider talking with us about what we usually do, rather than give us a number based on one observation. To be told we don't do something without asking us feels demeaning, especially when we know that some preschool days look different than others and we need to be flexible and creative with how we serve children and families."

"Someone to talk to about ideas that could be implemented to address the areas noted for improvement."

11.   What suggestions or comments do you have with regards to the assessment process?

Of the suggestions made, there were two ideas that were proposed by multiple programs:

1. Some programs would like the opportunity to speak with the assessor after the visit in order to make sure the information gathered was accurate. One program added that both the teacher and the director should be asked questions because teachers aren't always aware of staff requirements (ie: whether they have annual evaluations.)
2. Some programs would like the opportunity to respond to the feedback and/or scores.

A sample of additional comments:

"We need to develop our own system that actually makes sense. A checklist once every three years doesn't actually help... A program can have 5 manipulatives of this and that and be unkind to children and families. Or a program can have so, so handwashing but deliver the most socially and emotionally prepared kids to kindergarten. Where is the balance? What is actually important and qualifies HIGH QUALITY? I don't think ECERS identifies this. It's such a superficial process."

"Quicker return of reports. An assessment is very stressful and waiting weeks to find out how one's program scored maintains that level of stress for much longer that necessary."

"Not sure why it has to be unscheduled? I feel that we should know the day and time the assessor is coming. We have so much on our plates that we should know what day and time to expect the assessor."

"I think having the opportunity to respond to the feedback is an important part of the process, especially when you feel your score is way off base."