

Good afternoon, Representative Webb,

I wanted to bring your attention to updated SFY23 language AHS shared with House Appropriations Committee, as the committee may or already has reached out regarding this update. This language is to align education statute (16 V.S.A. § 829) with DCF Child Development Division's ability to update the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). QRIS, commonly called STARS, is the quality standards program to maintain and improve the quality of child care across Vermont.

Currently Universal Pre-K statute cites specific STARS levels for UPK status. DCF proposes the below changes to be able to alter the levels with which quality is measured. Without the language moving forward, Vermont will not be able to update our QRIS, which is necessary to maintain best practice implementation and to be in compliance with proposed federal legislation (e.g. Build Back Better). If we update the levels without making the change to statute first, we risk undue financial hardship for child care (UPK) programs needing to maintaining a 4 STAR level to quality for UPK status and UPK funding from Act 166. This could result in further program closures and/or increased cost of tuition for families.

16 V.S.A. § 829

(c) Prequalification. Pursuant to rules jointly developed and overseen by the Secretaries of Education and of Human Services and adopted by the State Board pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25, the Agencies jointly may determine that a private or public provider of prekindergarten education is qualified for purposes of this section and include the provider in a publicly accessible database of prequalified providers. At a minimum, the rules shall define the process by which a provider applies for and maintains prequalification status, shall identify the minimum quality standards for prequalification, and shall include the following requirements:

(1) A program of prekindergarten education, whether provided by a school district or a private provider, shall have received:

(A) National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation; or

(B) ~~at least four stars in the Department for Children and Families' STARS system with a plan to get to at least two points in each of the five arenas;~~ **be assessed at a quality level in Vermont's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) agreed up by the Secretaries of Education and of Human Services; or**

(C) ~~three stars in the STARS system~~ **have a** ~~has developed a plan, approved by~~ **the designees** ~~of the Commissioner for Children and Families and the Secretary of Education, to achieve the agreed upon quality level four or more stars with at least two points in each of the five arenas in no more than three years, and the provider has met intermediate milestones.~~

Explanation: Language update allows seamless transition for UPK providers within the STARS/QRIS system without potential negative financial consequences of losing UPK funding due to loss of UPK status.