



School-Age Success Story: Pennsylvania's After-School Quality Project

Pennsylvania Launches New Support for School-Age Programs in Keystone STARS

Pennsylvania has a longstanding commitment to strengthening its school-age care system. An important State approach to engaging the school-age community was including its stakeholders in building and planning Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Pennsylvania (PA) Keys to Quality, an initiative of the State's Office of Child Development and Early Learning, provides a system of supports for early childhood and school-age programs engaged in Keystone STARS and other quality improvement efforts. Supports include professional development opportunities for the early childhood and school-age workforce; independent Environmental Rating Scale assessments for early learning and school-age programs; and community engagement and outreach. PA Keys to Quality consists of a statewide Pennsylvania Key and five Regional Keys.

According to Leslie Roesler, Associate Director of Pennsylvania Key, "There is a real commitment in Pennsylvania to thinking about CQI [continuous quality improvement] and how we support CQI through the entire system at every level and for programs serving all ages...so that means a real focus on the 'I' in QRIS."

One of Pennsylvania's newest quality improvement supports for school-age care is the *After-School Quality* project, administered by PA Keys to Quality. The *After-School Quality* project supports programs to meet STAR 3 Leadership and Management standards for developing and implementing a CQI Plan.

The project began with a professional development event for 16 school-age specialists on the *After-School Quality*, a tool developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Together these specialists then trained staff from the 25 programs participating in the project to orient them to the *After-School Quality* tool. The participating programs included large and small community-based, school-based, and faith-based programs that collectively serve a total of 1,700 school-age children and youth. Each team received 40 hours of technical assistance from a school-age specialist. Over the course of the project year, each *After-School Quality* team conducted program observations, implemented surveys, and created and implemented an action plan.

The programs worked on a range of goals about adult-child relationships, health, safety, and supervision, and curriculum. In one program's survey of third- and fourth-graders, the children said, "You don't listen to what activities we want to do." The response: the program changed its activity planning to better engage its youth.

Using survey feedback to aid program improvement was a theme among participants. A director of another participating program noted, "I plan on developing a parent board to meet four times a year to look at the program and offer suggestions. I am also going to continue the surveys with the children and parents." Overall, participating programs reported that program leaders, families, and community stakeholders felt that the process improved shared decisionmaking and communication.

In September 2013, Pennsylvania launched its second group of programs in the *After-School Quality* project. Providence Connects, serving about 40 youth in the Pittsburg area is one of these. Tiffani Gorman, Before and Afterschool Coordinator for Providence Connects says, "I think it will be beneficial for us...there are some areas we can improve on... it's interesting to get feedback from parents, students, and staff."

Leslie Roesler agrees and hopes that more programs like Providence Connects will embrace the process of quality improvement. "I have always felt that there is potential to actually translate this process to support all programs participating in the QRIS, not just after-school programs but all early learning programs. That's where I would like to see this going...that is my vision for us."

For more information, contact Leslie Roesler:

Leslie Roesler
Associate Director
Pennsylvania Key
200 North 3rd Street, 3rd Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717) 213-2062
lesroe@berksiu.org

You can also visit the [PA Keys to Quality school-age page](#).