

Texas Rising Star Four Year Review Implementation Protocol Discussion Paper

Background

On January 21, 2020, the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) three-member Commission (Commission) approved the publication of a set of recommendations on Texas Rising Star. These recommendations were based on the input of the Texas Rising Star Workgroup and included recommendations for:

- a new requirement for all Texas Rising Star staff to complete a certification training course on the revised standards and assessment protocols;
- a new requirement for assessors to attain and maintain a new state assessor certification, ensuring consistent and reliable Texas Rising Star ratings across the state; and
- a statewide transition timeline to allow Texas Rising Star staff and currently certified programs time to become familiar with and plan for the changes.

Following a series of public comment opportunities on these recommendations, TWC developed proposed amendments to TWC's Chapter 809 Child Care Services rules. On October 6, 2020, the Commission approved the proposed rule changes for publication in the Texas Register and a 30-day public comment period. Pending Commission approval in January 2021, the final rules will go into effect in February 2021.

TWC must consider the impact to child care provider assessments and in-person visits during the time that Texas Rising Star staff are transitioning to and learning about the new Texas Rising Star standards. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted assessments and in-person visits leading up to the implementation of revisions. On March 17, 2020 the Commission approved guidance that allowed deferment of Texas Rising Star assessments and visits due to COVID-19. This guidance aligned with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations and subsequent Child Care Regulation (CCR) Emergency Rules that limit access to early learning programs to reduce the risk of viral transmission.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, TWC has facilitated webinars on best practices for conducting remote 2-Star assessments under the current Texas Rising Star standards, allowing new programs to attain certification. Additionally, TWC has coordinated webinars on providing remote coaching to child care programs to support Texas Rising Star mentoring activities. Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) have continued to have the option to conduct in-person activities with child care providers where local public health measures and Board policies and procedures allow. TWC has also aligned our ongoing monitoring of Texas Rising Star program's licensing history with the status of CCR's program monitoring protocols.

Issue

The Texas Rising Star revisions significantly modify program measures. Texas Rising Star assessor staff need time to receive training and to demonstrate competency in the revisions. To ensure consistent and reliable program ratings, assessors will be unable to conduct any assessments or monitoring visits until they have been trained on the new program requirements and achieved certification.

1 Statewide training for Texas Rising Star Staff on the revisions will begin in January 2021,
2 followed by a period for assessor staff to attain certification. Assessors are expected to pass all
3 ten modules, and to attain their certification prior to the roll-out date for the new standards,
4 which is scheduled for April 1, 2021. Assistance will be provided to assessor staff throughout the
5 certification course to assist in increasing their knowledge, skills and abilities so they can receive
6 certification. This will include the availability online training content, self-study online modules,
7 small group facilitated sessions and peer learning communities (PLCs). It is important that
8 Boards provide assessors with the time necessary to review the new standards, participate in
9 training, and become certified. During this time, Texas Rising Star mentor staff will also take
10 the Texas Rising Star training courses. However, mentors are not required to attain certification.
11 During this time, mentors will also work with child care programs, focusing on educating and
12 mentoring them on the revisions.

13 A temporary deferment on assessments and monitoring visits is needed to allow Texas Rising
14 Star staff to be trained on the revisions, assessors to attain certification, and mentors to provide
15 education and mentoring on the revisions to child care and early learning programs.

16 In addition to a deferment period to allow transition to the new standards, TWC will provide
17 Boards with a prioritization plan for resuming assessments and monitoring visits on a rolling
18 basis. Such a prioritization plan will be critical to addressing the backlog created by COVID-19
19 restrictions – due to prolonged nature of the pandemic, many of programs will be due for their
20 next monitoring visit by the time the revisions are implemented. Resetting monitoring visits,
21 recertifications, and facility change assessments that were delayed by COVID, as well as the
22 deferral period to implement the rules will assist in managing Texas Rising Star assessor
23 workloads consistently.

24 **Decision Points**

25 Staff seeks direction on:

- 26 ○ Requiring all Texas Rising Star assessors to pass the assessor trainings and attain their
27 required certification by the rollout date for the new Texas Rising Star standards,
28 currently scheduled for April 1, 2021; assessors who have not attained their certification
29 may not assess/rate programs.
- 30 ○ Allowing 2-Star (structural) assessments during January 2021; these assessments will be
31 conducted based on the existing measures;
- 32 ○ Deferring all assessments from February 1, 2021 through March 31, 2021;
- 33 ○ Deferring annual monitoring visits that are due between January 1, 2021 and March 31,
34 2021;
- 35 ○ Establishing an updated comprehensive schedule for all Texas Rising Star visits, and
36 directing Boards to follow TWC guidance which will be based on the following
37 priorities:
 - 38 ■ Priority 1 Recertification Visits
 - 39 ■ Priority 2 Facility Change Visits
 - 40 ■ Priority 3 Unannounced Annual Monitoring Visits
 - 41 ■ Priority 4 Voluntary Visits