

helping schools excel | helping children learn

## Keystone STARS:

Providing a measure of excellence in child care

The opportunity to administer the funds associated with the PA Keys program is one that the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) takes seriously. With this opportunity comes the responsibility that our early childhood programs, including Pre-K Counts, Head Start Supplemental, and Child Care, must serve as models for other Pennsylvania pre-K programs through exemplary participation in the STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support) program.

According to the PA Key, 75 percent of the BCIU Child Care programs needed to attain STAR 3 status in order for BCIU to continue to administer their funds. Thanks to the efforts put forth by each member of the Child Care staff, the program transitioned from two STAR 3 centers and eight STAR 2 centers to the reverse: eight STAR 3 centers and two STAR 2 centers.

### What is the "STARS" system?

The Keystone STARS is a state-funded, voluntary program through which pre-K programs earn STAR 1 through STAR 4 status. As programs meet higher standards, they move to a higher STARS level, much like the star system used to rate hotels. STARS promotes quality improvement in areas such as staff credentials and professional development, classroom environment and learning activities, program leadership and management, and family and community relationships. It also assists families in their efforts to locate quality early learning programs for their children.



*From left to right, Amber Santiago, Wendy Carr, Iliana Zayas, and Bonnie Bibbus work in preschool classrooms at the STAR-certified BCIU Learning Center at the Education Centre. Currently, there are 27 STARS centers in Berks County with 3 or 4 STAR status, and BCIU Child Care operates nine of them.*

### Child Care Staff Moves Into High Gear!

Upon learning of the STARS challenge, the BCIU Child Care staff made the commitment to meet the requirements so that every center would earn a STAR 3 or higher designation. The task required that each staff person complete a minimum of 18 hours of professional development in areas specified by STARS, such as pediatric first aid, health and safety, curriculum and assessment techniques, and classroom management. Such topics are required of all BCIU Child Care employees, but courses had to be completed by the December 31, 2010 deadline.

A STAR 3 designation also requires that 75 percent of the assistant teachers possess a minimum of six college credits in early childhood education. As a result of a partnership formed between Reading Area Community College and the BCIU Child Care program, 12 assistant teachers completed this requirement during the summer of 2010. For many of the participants, attending college-level courses was a new and challenging experience, but it was an accomplishment that yielded a sense of pride and satisfaction.

Additionally, three teachers in school-age centers are working to complete the three college-level courses offered through Keystone College, which will earn them their director's credential. With the anticipated completion date of April 30, 2011, their centers will also be eligible to apply for a STAR 3 designation. Three other school-age center directors assumed the responsibility of directing two centers while their colleagues worked toward the completion of their director's credential.

All staff contributed to the STARS challenge in some manner, whether through the completion of their Professional Development Record (PDR) binder, the implementation of the new assessment system, or the development of continuous quality improvement plans based on the information gleaned from the ERS.

### Impact of STARS Designation

The attainment of STAR 3 status by eight of the BCIU Child Care centers is a great source of pride for all of the program staff. In addition, STARS participation resulted in \$103,637.20 being awarded to the centers, creating new educational opportunities for the staff.

"STARS is a great opportunity for our center because it covers costs for other trainings that will benefit staff and help purchase better materials for the center. The program helps children to grow and learn," said **Marie Garrett**, assistant teacher, BCIU Learning Center at 12th and Marion. More importantly, it will serve to



*Pamela Hoffmaster, left, and Angela Smith work with school-age children at the STAR-certified BCIU Learning Center at Schuylkill Valley. The STARS program is designed to improve, support, and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania.*

assure families that BCIU Child Care is providing a quality early learning experience for their children, partially as a result of continued professional development by the staff, the development of respectful family and community partnerships through frequent communication and collaboration, and an ongoing focus on data-driven program improvement.

According to data collected by the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), 97 percent of preschoolers enrolled in Keystone STAR 3 or 4 centers show age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and social skills. Of the 111 participating STARS centers in Berks County, 27 have achieved STAR 3 or 4 status, and of those 27, nine of the programs are operated by the BCIU Child Care program.

BCIU Child Care is committed to the STARS program's goal of continuous quality improvement. With the combined efforts of the entire staff, the BCIU Child Care program will continue to provide an exemplary program for Berks County children and their families!

For more information about the Keystone STARS program, contact **Wendy Steensland** at [wenste@berksiu.org](mailto:wenste@berksiu.org) or 610-987-8522.

