

Improving Quality for Child Care Centers in Greater Philadelphia: An Evaluation of Success By 6[®] Executive Summary

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The Success By 6[®] (SB6) initiative is designed to support early care and education centers in improving and sustaining quality in Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).¹ Keystone STARS is a statewide QRIS that is comprised of four levels, STAR 1 through 4. Achieving high quality early care and education is a critical activity to promote positive development of children in Philadelphia and the nation, particularly for children from low-income families. SB6 was launched in 2007 by the United Way (UW) of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey with funding from the William Penn Foundation, United Way, and other community partners. Centers engaged in the 18 – 24 month initiative receive intensive technical assistance, program improvement funds, and other resources that target movement in Keystone STARS from a STAR 2 to a STAR 3. In addition, SB6 supports sustainability at the centers by offering leadership development as well as financial awards for centers that achieve a STAR 3 or 4.



SB6 is at a point in implementation that is ideal for reflection and evaluation. In the past eight years, SB6 has recruited 368 centers to participate in the initiative and has achieved an overall success rate (center movement to a STAR 3 or higher within 24 months of participation) of 60% regionally and 46% in Philadelphia. From the inception of SB6, the management team at UW, with partners from the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children (DVAEYC), Montgomery Early Learning Centers (MELC) and Saint Joseph's University, has engaged in shared decision-making and a continuous improvement process to revise and update service components in response to feedback from the centers that participate and the technical assistance consultants working in the field. To supplement this ongoing internal review of SB6 activities and progress, Child Trends was engaged in 2014 to conduct an evaluation of SB6 design, implementation and results. **The purpose of the SB6 evaluation report is to describe key findings and to offer a set of recommendations for SB6 stakeholders to consider for improvement. The report is intended to inform discussions about quality improvement within SB6 and nationally.**

Summary and Implications

The SB6 evaluation report examined implementation and outcomes using multiple perspectives and analytic techniques. The findings have implications for SB6 continuous quality improvement process and can inform the broader field of ECE quality improvement.

¹ Keystone STARS is an initiative of Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).

SB6 operates effectively, and is well-equipped to make changes for the future.

Results from interviews and surveys indicate that SB6, overall, has a strong set of collaborative partners. The management team has a history of making changes to SB6 as centers' needs have changed, or when improvements were required in SB6 operations. SB6 participants, particularly the center directors, are very satisfied with their experience and believe the quality of their center has improved as a result of participating in SB6. In recent years, SB6 partners have seen a shift in the needs of incoming centers. This perception was verified with evaluation data showing differences in the characteristics of directors and teachers from previous and current SB6 cohorts. New engagement and consultation strategies are needed to address the next generation of centers entering SB6 and to provide support to centers as they work to improve and sustain quality. In addition, Pennsylvania is considering a revision of the Keystone STARS standards. These newly revised standards may necessitate more significant changes to the quality improvement activities offered in SB6.

TA consultants may need enhanced supervision and mentoring, opportunities to build skills and access to better tools to support their work with centers.

Across current and previous SB6 participants, satisfaction with TA consultants is very high. Yet, the analysis revealed specific concerns about the recruitment, selection, and training of TA consultants. First, 70% (seven out of 10) of SB6 partners reported that they would like TA consultants to have more experience with specific consultation topics (e.g., business practices). Four out of the 10 respondents also indicated that they encounter a limited pool of TA consultants when recruiting for new positions. Given recruitment challenges, it is important to provide closer supervision and mentoring as well as opportunities for professional development for TA consultants. Current TA consultants identified conflict resolution, business practices, managing change, and leadership/management as areas for their own professional development. As SB6 shifts to serving a more disadvantaged group of centers, TA consultants may identify additional training requests and tools that are needed to support their work.

Teachers have unique experiences in SB6, and it will be helpful to learn more about their needs.

Though current and previous SB6 teachers are generally positive about SB6, they report a less positive experience than directors. Though directors (not teachers) are typically the primary audience for SB6 services, TA consultants often work directly with teachers, and teacher buy-in, capacity to change their practices, and increase their education are critical to moving up in STARS. UW and the TA agencies would benefit from further assessment of how teachers' needs in SB6 might be the same or different than directors' needs in the TA process. For example, tools to measure "readiness to change" could be completed by teachers and then used as a way for TA consultants to tailor their approach with each teacher. Directors may also need new ways to communicate the expectations of teachers throughout the quality improvement process so that it incorporates teachers' ideas and goals.

The ERS are a focal point of SB6 consultation.

The evaluation team observed TA consultants working on the ERS or the learning environment in 75% of the observation cycles, a finding that is consistent with TA consultants' reports of the topics they spend time on with centers. As the ECE field shifts toward a greater emphasis on intentional teaching and interactions and their role in supporting children's development, it will be important to consider how to enhance SB6 consultation to include tools that measure and support these constructs. The pending revision of Keystone STARS standards will provide additional guidance. This revision process is intended to clarify how the STARS standards align with goals such as improved policies and procedures and promotion of child development outcomes. The SB6 model may need adjustments to support centers in meeting these revised quality indicators.

The data infrastructure of SB6 could benefit from an upgrade to a paperless system.

Administrative documents (e.g., contact logs, quarterly reports, PIF budgets) in SB6 are currently gathered and stored using paper and some electronic files (e.g., excel files and pdf's). The current

structure is not set up to provide opportunities for easy tabulations and report-generation, particularly for documentation of consultation visits. Investment in a simple web-based data system to facilitate data entry across organizational partners and the SB6 management team is worth consideration.

Centers are improving, but further supports are needed to improve the move up rate.

The analysis of move up rates indicates that many centers are benefiting from participation in SB6. SB6 centers move up in STARS at a higher rate than a matched comparison group of centers. Centers also are improving their ERS scores *during* participation in SB6. Overall, however, about 50% of centers that participate in SB6 do not move up in STARS.

Data are not available to show how SB6 centers fare on all STARS standards above STAR 2 which limits the ability to understand move up rates completely. We can, however, use available data to draw some initial conclusions about why centers do not move up in STARS. For example, SB6 administrator and supervisor interviews and TA consultant surveys indicate that the most significant barrier to moving up to STAR 3 is standards related to Career Lattice and Staff Qualifications. Data from the contact logs and interviews indicate that TA consultants spend a small portion (13%) of their time working with centers on staff development and qualifications. Because we have insufficient data on teacher and director education before and after SB6 participation, it is important to examine this area more closely and to track it over time to understand the options for supporting centers on this component of STARS. It may be possible to provide TA consultants with new strategies for working with centers on teacher development, recruitment and selection of teachers, and retention of high-quality teachers. Other opportunities such as scholarships for education and obtaining credit for training completed through SB6 should also be discussed as options for improving career lattice and qualifications.



Center size is an important factor to consider in SB6 consultation and STARS move up.

Center size emerged as a predictor of the STARS move up profiles of centers in SB6. The analyses indicate that large centers (those serving 100 or more children) were in the group that had the highest move up rates, despite having the same baseline ERS score as other groups. It will be helpful to look further into the role of center size in move up and when allocating TA hours and Program Improvement Fund (PIF) resources. Since both the amount of time with TA consultants and PIF awards are allotted based on the number of children or classrooms, large centers are receiving the most consultation time and financial awards. It is possible that large centers are allocating PIF funds and using TA time in a more effective way, or it's possible that they are simply improving because they have more resources. Further analysis of these questions is needed.

Lessons for the Field of ECE Quality Improvement

Though SB6 is a regional initiative with a focus on quality improvement in one state's QRIS, the lessons learned from the evaluation are valuable to share with the larger field of ECE quality improvement. The findings from the SB6 evaluation contribute to the limited knowledge about implementation and outcomes of quality improvement initiatives associated with QRIS. We highlight the following themes and implications for the field:

- 1. Effective implementation of quality improvement initiatives requires monitoring and flexibility to adjust policies and procedures.** Quality improvement initiatives underway nationally have structures similar to SB6. They involve multiple partners in the delivery of consultation, and they require coordination with a state or local QRIS that may have frequent changes in its own

operations (e.g., changes in the QRIS quality standards) (Isner et al., 2011). The findings from SB6 highlight the importance of developing administration and management structures that can monitor activities in the field and develop solutions to implementation issues that arise. For example, as the needs of centers changed in recent SB6 cohorts, the management team developed a new feature – a readiness cohort – to address the challenges that center directors faced in engaging fully in the typical SB6 activities. The evaluation also revealed the importance of attending to data infrastructure and investing in a system that can facilitate entry and review of documentation and production of reports that can be used for monitoring and feedback about implementation.

- 2. Management structures that include key partners from the ECE system are important for quality improvement initiatives.** The SB6 management team includes representatives from United Way, the agencies delivering technical assistance and Keystone STARS (through the regional keys). The partners report that this structure supports regular communication and problem-solving and has allowed for adaptation of the initiative over time. The inclusion of this team is consistent with best practices in implementation.
- 3. Financial incentives are an important component of a quality improvement initiative.** SB6 provides substantial financial incentives through the provision of Program Improvement Funds, and centers also have access to STARS awards. The SB6 funds are used primarily to support the purchase of classroom materials and make some facility improvements. Because quality improvement funds in SB6 are packaged together with other supports such as consultation, it is impossible to isolate the effectiveness of financial incentives in improving classroom quality. However, nearly all directors agree that the funds are a critical tool in their quality improvement. And, it is likely that the materials that are purchased with the funds are supporting center improvements on the ERS. As quality improvement initiatives shift to include a focus on intentional teaching, it is important to consider how financial incentives can be used to promote improvements in the environment and in interactions with children.
- 4. Supporting the early care and education workforce is a key challenge for quality improvement initiatives.** Results from the SB6 evaluation indicate that TA consultants spend most of their time focusing on improvements in the learning environment. While some time is allocated to reviewing staff qualifications and career lattice levels, TA consultation is not designed for addressing workforce qualification issues. It is important to discuss how other meaningful workforce opportunities can be embedded in quality improvement initiatives. Scholarships for higher education, wage supplements, and credit-bearing training opportunities are options that could be tested but that would require additional investments.

Study Overview

The evaluation activities address research questions related to SB6 design, implementation and results:

SB6 Design: SB6 design includes the logic model and the activities conducted to support centers in quality improvement (i.e., the service model). Evaluation activities in this area assessed how the SB6 service model compares to other evidence-based models of quality improvement being used nationally. To facilitate the comparison, Child Trends[®] conducted a synthesis of the quality improvement literature—*[A Blueprint of Early Care and Education Quality Improvement Initiatives](#)*—and used the Blueprint as a structure for examining SB6 design and identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The results of the analysis are available in the Program Design Appendix (see www.childtrends.org).

SB6 Implementation: SB6 implementation includes the fidelity and consistency with which SB6 activities are delivered to centers. Evaluation activities in this area assessed the services provided, the perceptions of the center directors and teachers participating in the activities, and the experiences of the technical assistance consultants delivering the services.

SB6 Results: SB6 results refers to its success rate, documented as the percentage of centers served that move from a STAR 2 to a STAR 3 within 24 months. Evaluation activities in this area assessed how SB6 services are related to outcomes as well as the predictors of success and sustained quality improvement.

Method

The evaluation included data from multiple sources:

- surveys of 132 directors and 114 teachers working in centers served by SB6 (either currently or in the past²),
- 14 interviews with members of the SB6 management team,
- 18 on-site observations of SB6 technical assistance (TA) consultants working directly in centers,
- document review of 365 contact logs with details about TA consultants' contacts with 17 centers,
- census data to understand the community context of SB6 centers, and
- center-level Keystone STARS data obtained from the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning.

The STARS data included information about STARS rating, STARS technical assistance, and financial awards from over 300 centers. The census data and Keystone STARS data were used to create a matched comparison group of 153 centers in the Philadelphia region which had characteristics similar to SB6 centers but had not received SB6 services (non-SB6 centers).³

Interviews, surveys, contact logs, and observation data were analyzed and coded to provide insights into the fidelity and consistency of service delivery in SB6 including strengths and areas for improvement.

Multivariate statistical analyses were conducted to examine the “move up” rate for SB6 centers compared to the matched non-SB6 centers.⁴ To acknowledge the possibility that individual centers may have different facilitators and barriers to increasing quality in Keystone STARS, four “profiles” of centers were created and their patterns of move up and observed quality on the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) were compared.⁵

Results

Community Context of SB6 Centers: When interpreting the evaluation results, it is important to understand the communities in which SB6 centers are located. SB6 centers analyzed for this study were situated in a diverse mix of communities that serve low-income and middle-income families. In the areas served by SB6 in greater Philadelphia, the average unemployment rate was 12%, and 12% of families lived below the poverty level. The majority (63%) of residents were white, and a quarter (28%) of residents were black. Working families surrounding SB6 centers had a median income of about \$60,000. There are notable differences, however, in the demographics of centers in Philadelphia relative to the three surrounding suburban counties. In Philadelphia county, unemployment was at 13%, 15% of families live below the poverty level, 38% of the residents were black, and the median income was \$48,000.

² For this report, Cohorts 5-13 (program start dates July 2009 – July 2013) were considered previous participants. Cohorts 14-15 (program start dates which began in January 2014 – July 2015) were considered current participants.

³ Propensity score matching was used to create the comparison group.

⁴ Two statistical techniques were employed to compare move up rates: multivariate logistic regression models and a survival analysis.

⁵ Latent profile analysis was used to create the four groups.

Change in Center Participants across SB6 Cohorts: Directors and teachers participating in current SB6 cohorts differ in important ways from those who participated previously in SB6. In general, current participants are more disadvantaged than previous SB6 participants. For example, current SB6 directors report working fewer hours per week (34 vs. 44), and have lower annual salaries than previous SB6 directors (\$32,000 vs. \$52,000). Current SB6 teachers are much more likely than previous teachers to have a high school diploma as their highest level of education (24% vs. 0%). Similarly, current teachers are less likely to have a bachelor's degree than previous SB6 teachers (19% vs. 37%). The SB6 management team has adjusted the SB6 service model to address the challenges of centers in recent cohorts, but further adjustments may be needed to support new entrants to SB6.

Implementation Results: TA consultants averaged 3.4 hours per visit and reported visiting centers once or twice per month. While at the center, TA consultants were observed to use a variety of strategies in their work with directors and teachers: gathering information by answering and asking questions (observed in 64% of the 15-minute observation cycles); giving feedback and recommendations (59% of cycles); relationship building (39% of cycles); conducting observations (34% of cycles); setting goals (24% of cycles); and modeling (9% of cycles). TA consultants reported that relationship-building is the most important strategy they use. TA consultants reported spending the most time with centers on topics related to the Environment Rating Scales, child observation, curriculum and assessment, business practices, and continuous quality improvement. TA consultants reported that the ERS results are the most useful tool they use in quality improvement, followed by the SB6 Service Plan (a jointly developed plan for improvement structured around the Keystone STARS quality standards) and Program Improvement Funds. All TA consultants reported that they have positive relationships with the centers they serve and believed that SB6 is beneficial for centers. However, the majority of TA consultants only somewhat agreed that their time with centers is spent efficiently and that centers respond to them in a timely manner. While 8 of 13 TA consultants reported mostly following the SB6 technical assistance guide in their work, five reported following about half of the model and making their own modifications.



Directors participating in SB6 (either currently or previously) reported having a very positive impression of SB6 (78% and 91% respectively). Nearly all (94%) of directors previously in SB6 agreed that their center is higher quality as a result of participating in SB6, compared to 67% of directors who are still in process with SB6. Current and previous SB6 directors reported that the SB6 TA consultation and Program Improvement Funds are/were the most helpful in achieving their Service Plan goals. Current and previous SB6 directors generally reported being very satisfied with the various SB6 activities. Among previous SB6 directors, however, lower satisfaction levels (“somewhat satisfied”) or reports of “no opinion” or “not applicable” were noted for Directors’ Learning Circles, Peer Learning Circles, and Institute for Family Professionals Courses.

Teachers participating in SB6 (either currently or previously) also reported positive impressions of SB6 though teachers are overall less positive than directors. For example, 63% of current SB6 teachers and 47% of previous SB6 teachers reported that they have a very positive impression of SB6. (Interestingly, current teachers have more positive impressions than previous teachers, while the reverse is true of directors.) Teachers (current and previous) reported lower levels of satisfaction (“somewhat satisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied”) or “no opinion” of SB6 activities. About two thirds (64%) of previous SB6 teachers agreed that their center is higher quality as a result of participating in SB6 compared to 47% of teachers currently participating in SB6.

Across TA consultants, directors and teachers, the results suggest that implementation of SB6 has a number of strengths but also opportunities for improvements.

- Teachers have a different experience than directors in the quality improvement process. The SB6 management team and TA consultants could benefit from a better understanding of the

motivations and needs of teachers in the quality improvement process and how they differ from directors' needs. TA consultants may need additional strategies to increase teachers' positive perceptions of SB6.

- Strategies are needed to increase the efficiency of TA consultant time spent at centers. The SB6 management team may want to shadow TA consultants on visits over a defined period and then convene a meeting with them to reflect together on their observations and discuss opportunities for improvement.
- It is important to understand the variations in the consultation model that TA consultants reported and whether the variations are supporting SB6 goals. The SB6 management team may need to provide updated training and refresh the consultation model to ensure that it is providing a strong foundation for consultation. This review should also include a review of contact log content and procedures for completing Service Plans.
- Enhancements are needed to improve uptake of and satisfaction with Directors' Learning Circles and Peer Learning Circles. A new format and/or new content may be helpful for increasing interest in these activities among SB6 participants. Alternatively, the SB6 management team may want to consider developing new opportunities or enhancing existing TA consultation to replace the learning circles for some participants.

Implementation Summary: SB6 has been operating effectively with high levels of satisfaction from participants. Areas for improvement include increasing efficiency of TA consultant time, increasing fidelity to the service model and service documentation, and revisiting the purpose and structure of the learning circles for directors and teachers.

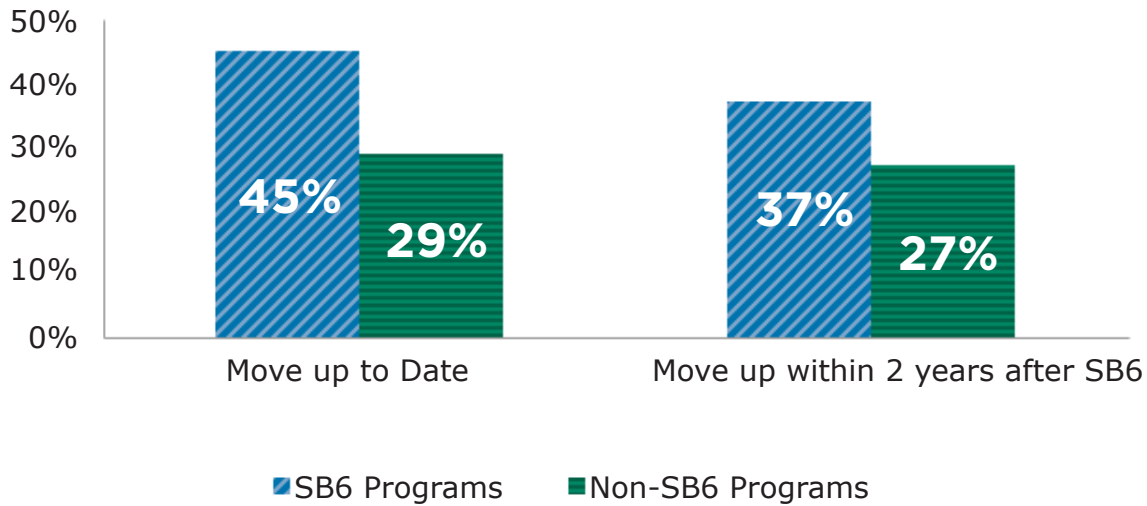
Outcomes Results: The SB6 management team tracks the “move up” rate of SB6 centers. However, the tracking process doesn't allow a comparison of move up rates between SB6 centers and centers that are similar but have not enrolled in SB6. The evaluation team used administrative data from Keystone STARS to identify a matched comparison group of centers. The results indicate that SB6 centers, to date, were more likely to move up in STARS than the comparison group (45% vs. 29%).⁶ The probability of moving up within two years⁷ of completing SB6 was also higher for SB6 participants (37% vs. 27%).

A second analysis was conducted to identify unique profiles of SB6 centers. Center size, years enrolled in Keystone STARS, and participation in STARS TA were defining characteristics between the four profiles that were identified. The first group was medium sized SB6 centers that had also participated in STARS TA (i.e., Medium/TA). SB6 centers that hadn't participated in STARS TA were a second group (i.e., No STARS TA). The third group had fewer years in STARS than other groups, and was made up of current SB6 participants (i.e., Current Centers). The fourth group was a mix of small and large SB6 centers that had also participated in STARS TA (i.e., Small + Large/TA). As expected, the “Current Centers” group had low move up rates (7%) because they are still participating in SB6. The “Medium/TA” centers moved up in STARS at a higher rate than “No STARS TA” centers (52% vs. 42%). Small + Large/TA centers had the highest move up rate (63%).

⁶ SB6 centers were matched with similar centers based on their tenure in Keystone STARS (as one matching factor). “To Date” moving up in STARS indicates whether a center moved from a STAR 2 to a STAR 3 or above at some point since enrolling in STARS. This timeframe varies and begins when the center entered STARS and ends in April 2015 when the data were obtained.

⁷ For SB6 centers, move up within two years was calculated by adding 24 months to the date after they completed SB6 (which typically takes 18 months). For the comparison group, this move up metric was calculated by adding 3.5 years from their first STAR 2 rating. This was approximately equivalent to the 18 months plus 24 months post-SB6 for the treatment group.

Figure 1: Percentage of Centers Moving Up* from a STAR 2 in Keystone STARS



Source: Child Trends' analysis of Keystone STARS administrative data obtained from OCDEL, April 30, 2015.
*Percentages represent predicted probability of moving up after controlling for years in STARS, enrolled in STARS before or after 2009, center size, receipt of STARS TA and awards, and census demographics.

Outcomes Summary: Overall, the outcome results indicate that SB6 is successful in moving centers from a STAR 2 to a STAR 3. SB6 provides a 16 percentage point “move up” boost to centers that participate. The profile analyses suggest that factors such as center size play a role in the quality improvement process and are worth attending to in SB6 policies and practices. The results also reflect the challenges of quality improvement for many centers, even when they have access to supports.

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