

Illinois State Board of Education—STAR NET 2012–13 Evaluation Summary

The goal of STAR NET is to provide a variety of opportunities for personal and professional growth for those who touch the lives of young children, ages birth through eight, with an emphasis on children with special needs. STAR NET provides training, consultation, and resources to the early childhood community in Illinois. STAR NET supports family-centered, researched and evidence-based practices in early childhood education and care. The STAR NET system works to develop more effective partnerships and linkages among families, professionals, and systems.

STAR NET is operated statewide through a grant awarded by the Illinois State Board of Education. All of the funding for this project is from federal sources. As a statewide system, STAR NET assists the Illinois State Board of Education Division of Early Childhood in meeting regional and local needs by providing professional development services throughout Illinois. To facilitate the management of activities, the project has been divided into six regions, with Regions I and III operating under the same management structure.

The focus of STAR NET is to increase knowledge acquisition and facilitate skill application. The project accomplishes this mission by:

- (1) Identifying needs and responding to requests for professional development support of staff and families involved in early childhood special education;
- (2) Developing and delivering inservice training and technical assistance including workshops, online distance education, consultation, fellowships, referrals, and materials loan and dissemination;
- (3) Supporting family education and involvement;
- (4) Collaborating with other early childhood initiatives, agencies, and personnel; and
- (5) Promoting family-centered perspectives with other initiatives, organizations, and personnel.

This report highlights the work conducted between July 1, 2012–June 30, 2013.



STAR NET Evaluation

The work of STAR NET is organized around the following major strands:

- Training and Workshops
- Technical Assistance
- Funding
- Library and Resource Dissemination
- Collaboration

Evaluation Methodology

In 2002, a responsive evaluation design was conceptualized relying on the premise of measuring outcomes as reported by early childhood education and care providers in the state of Illinois. The majority of evaluation resources and efforts were intended to monitor how well the STAR NET system was meeting its objectives and outcomes and to determine the overall impact of the project around these outcomes. In addition, the evaluation was designed to support immediate program improvement and provide timely information for decision-making to the management team.

A significant portion of the evaluation was developed around a logic model, which is intended to examine immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. The logic model highlights several “ultimate outcomes” in which qualitative and quantitative impact data are collected. Data were collected in a variety of ways including end-of-session training and technical assistance evaluations, follow up surveys, questionnaires related to the funding, resource dissemination, and a compilation of all the collaborations supported by STAR NET directors and regional staff members.

“The training really made me reflect on my teaching and personal relationships. This workshop was very empowering and made me think outside of the box.”

— Region II

STAR NET Trainings and Workshops

The logic model outcomes and indicators reflect the broader state and federal context. In addition, in recent years, more effort was given to evaluating the impact of webinars, family training, and collaborative efforts on statewide conferences. The following sections will highlight the evaluation findings from across the broad array of STAR NET activities.

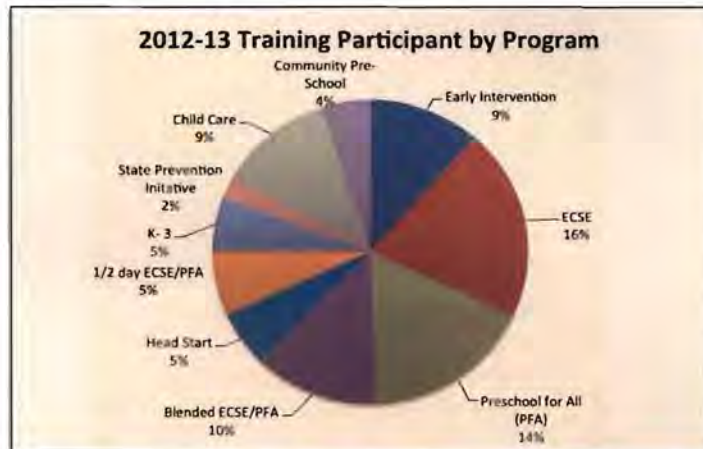
Number of Trainings and Workshops

STAR NET conducted 261 training sessions across Illinois between July 1, 2012–June 30, 2013 for 7,152 individuals. Evaluation forms were collected at the end of each training session. A total of 6,288 end-of-session surveys were collected. Return rates across the six regions ranged from 84% to 97% with an overall statewide return rate of 88%. Furthermore, a random sample of participants were asked to complete a follow up survey approximately three months after a training event. All of the regions report they send the survey to 20% of attendees. Return rates ranged from 29% to 50% with an overall statewide return rate at 37%. In total, 525 training follow up surveys were completed.



Participants

Of the 7,152 training participants, Teachers represented the largest group in STAR NET supported training events for the 2012-13 fiscal year. Similar to the past 5 years, Teachers represented the largest group of participants (35%), with Teachers Assistants (10%), Speech Language Pathologists (10%), and OTs/PTs (7%) also representing a significant percentage of participants. Individuals from a variety of different early childhood education and care systems were strongly represented in STAR NET trainings. The majority of the training individuals were employed by ISBE funded programs, including Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Blended ECSE/Preschool for All, and Preschool for All (PFA) programs. In addition, 9% of the participants were from Early Intervention, 9% from Child Care, and 5% from Head Start.



End of Training Evaluation

Program attendees rated the training positively across all indicators, with particularly strong responses to the following:

- Presenters were clearly experienced in their content
- Presented in an organized manner
- Training increased my ability to access resources
- Training increased my abilities to help my child's education and development.

As the chart below illustrates, participants also indicated strong agreement that the "information was relevant," "organized," and was presented by "those with clear experience." Family members indicated that the workshops were "beneficial," "organized," and "increased their knowledge" related to supporting their children and family.



Webinar Trainings and Family Trainings

In addition to traditional face-to-face trainings with early childhood practitioners and families, STAR NET has increased its training offerings through webinars. In 2012-13, STAR NET offered a total of 62 webinars, with 2,306 individuals participating. While slightly under the ratings of the face-to-face trainings, mean ratings of the webinars across all evaluation items were high with all averages ranging in the "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" range.

Although STAR NET has always provided training for families, a more focused evaluation of these trainings has been implemented in recent years. In 2012-13, the new evaluation form was used for 33 Family Trainings in which 391 individuals participated. Mean ratings across all evaluation items were high reflecting a great deal of impact from these family-focused trainings. The highest ratings were in the area of "Clear expertise of presenters" (mean=4.91) and "Presented in organized manner" (mean=4.81)

"I was able to incorporate the information I learned from the STAR NET training into my day to day interactions with families and educators." — Region V

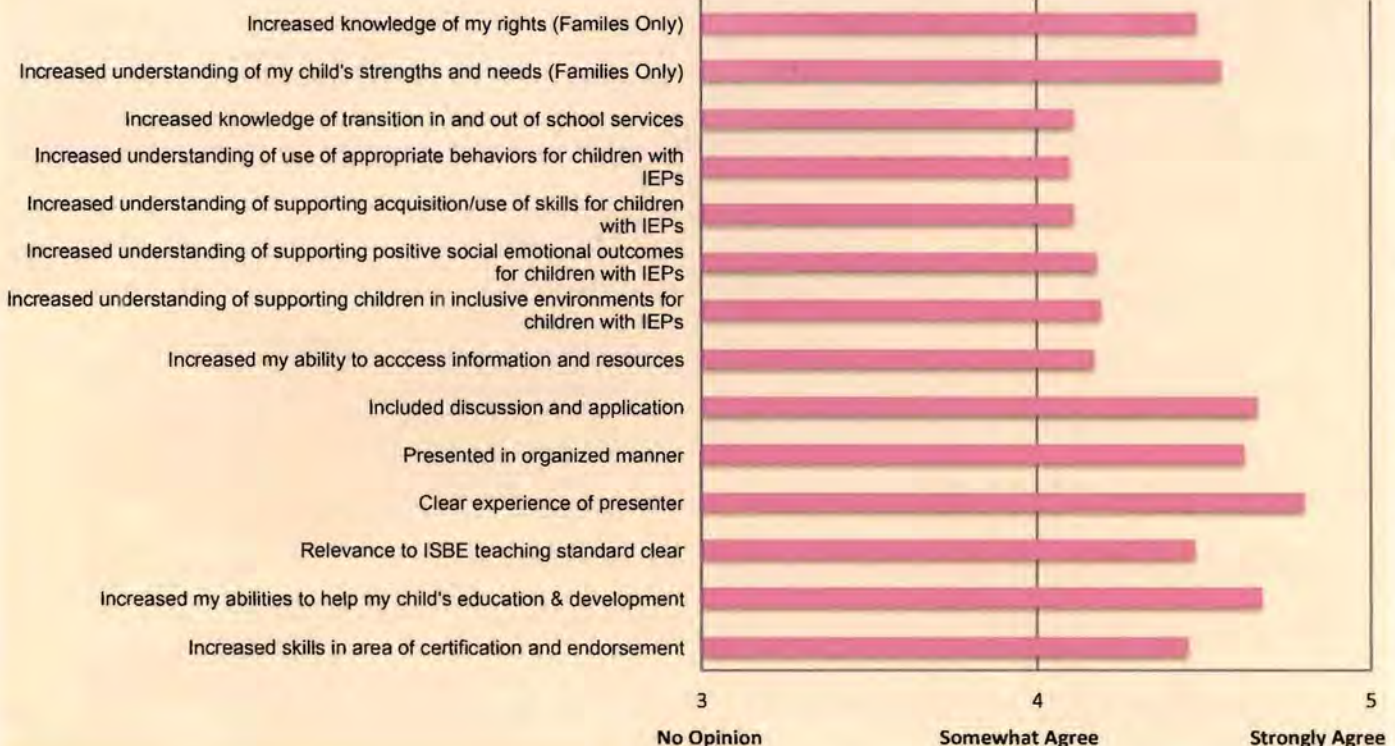
"The training helped me to understand my child's behavior and to support my child's behavior."

— Family Member

2012 - 13 Family Training Ratings



2012 - 13 Overall Webinar Ratings



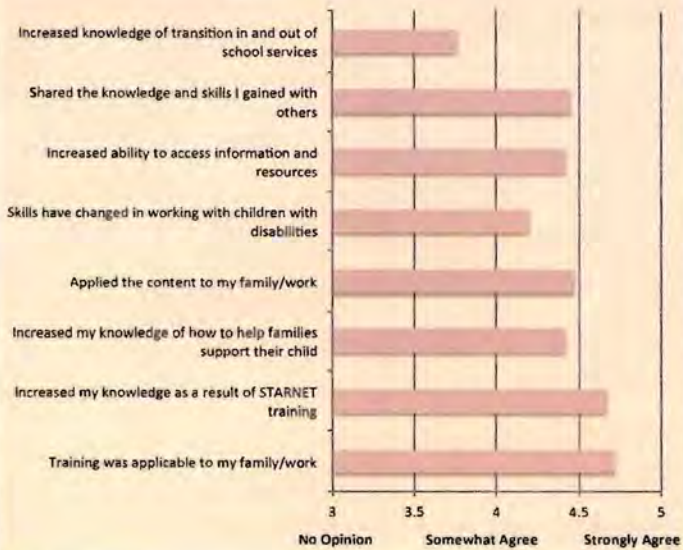
Training Follow Up

Data gathered from the Training Follow Up survey indicated that participants across all programs reported that the training remained applicable to their work (mean=4.72) several weeks after they attended the STARNET training. In addition, the rating about improving their knowledge of practices that supported children with disabilities (mean=4.67) and their families (mean=4.42) received high ratings. Notably, participants also indicated that they increased their skills in accessing resources and information (n=4.42) and that they share the knowledge and skills with others (mean=4.45).

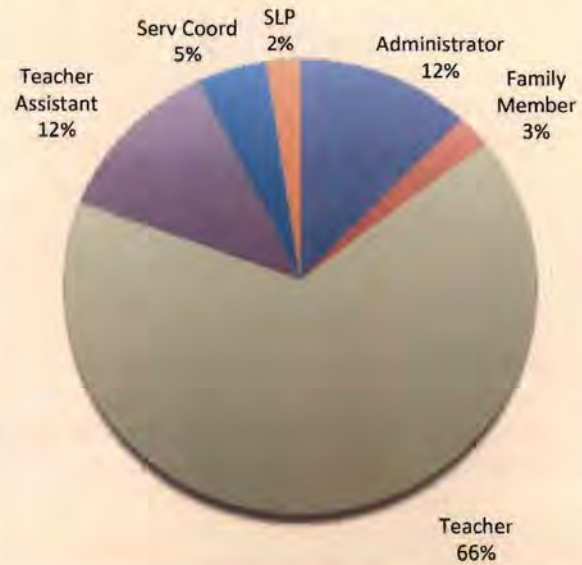
"I have made several changes including rearranging my room, adding books/writing materials to each center, and expanding my science center."

— Regions I and III

2012 - 13 Overall Training Follow Up Evaluation Ratings



Webinar Follow Up Participants by Role



Webinar Follow Up

Similar to the Training Follow Up survey, participants in webinars also received a survey approximately 12 weeks after the event. In total, 175 individuals who participated in a STAR NET supported webinar received a follow up survey. Overall, 97 individuals returned the survey for a return rate of 55%. As the chart above depicts, two thirds of the respondents were teachers, and another 12% were teacher assistants. The highest ratings were noted for the "Training was applicable to their work" (mean = 4.8), it "Increased their knowledge of practices that support children with disabilities" (mean = 4.56), and they "Applied that information to work with their family/the families they support" (mean = 4.51).

2012 - 13 Overall Webinar Follow Up Evaluation Ratings

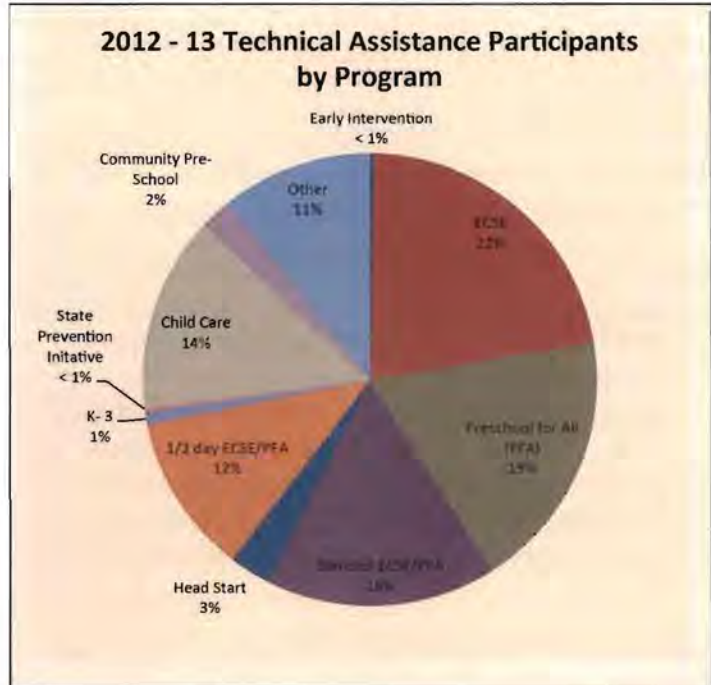


Number of Technical Assistance Activities

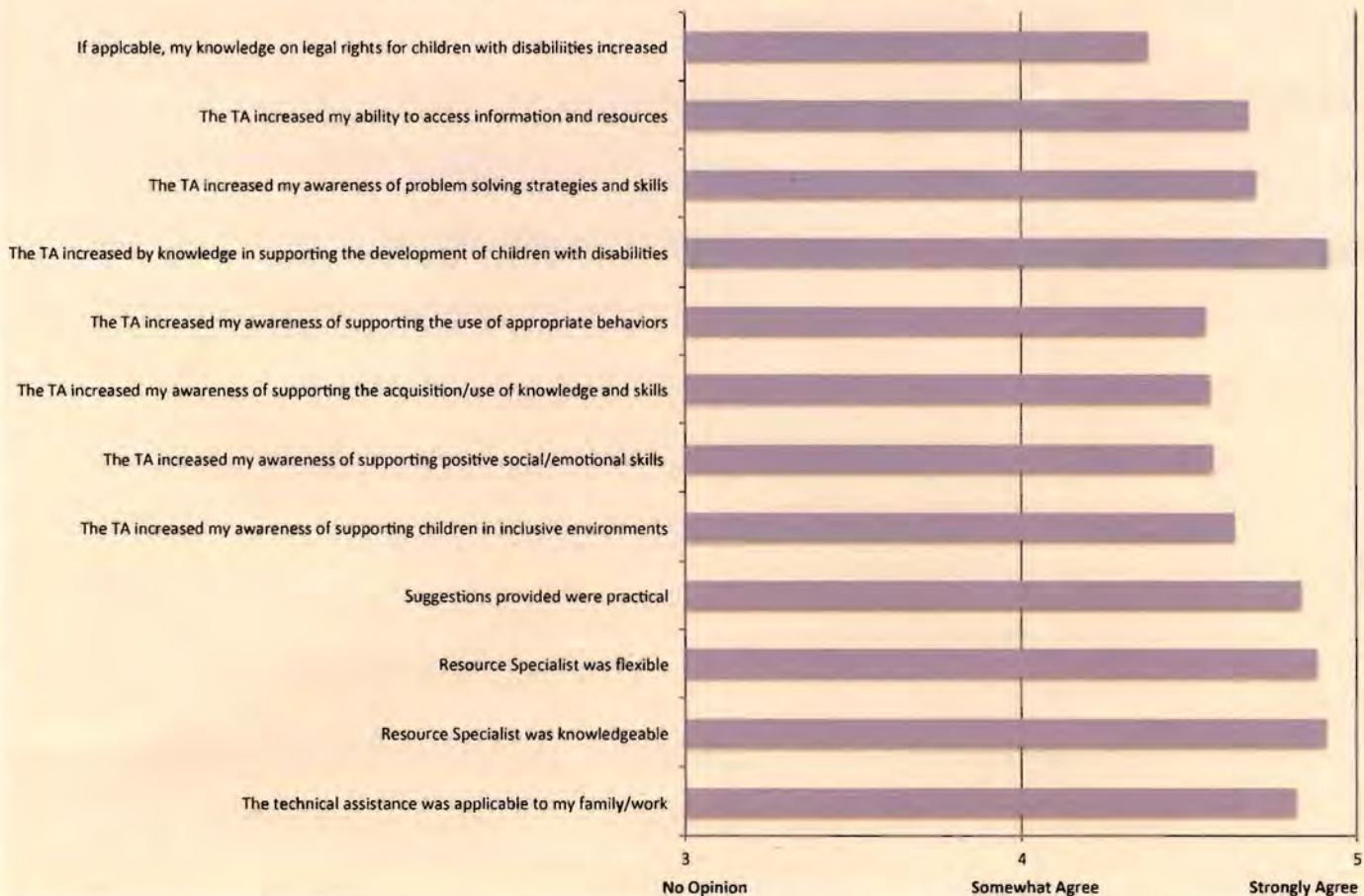
STAR NET conducted 143 technical assistance (TA) sessions across Illinois between July 1, 2012–June 30, 2013 for 400 individuals. Evaluation forms were collected at the completion of each technical assistance session. A total of 400 participants were asked to complete a survey and 331 end of TA session surveys were returned. Return rates across the six regions ranged from 44% to 96% with an overall statewide return rate of 83%. Furthermore, a random sample of participants were asked to complete a follow up survey approximately three months after a TA event. Five of the six regions were able to conduct follow up evaluations of their TA efforts. Return rates ranged from 17% to 46% and an overall statewide return rate at 36%.

Technical Assistance Participants

As the chart to the right illustrates, the majority of those receiving technical assistance from STAR NET were from ECSE programs (22%), Preschool for All (19%), ECSE/Blended PFA programs (16%), Child Care programs (14%), and ½ day ECSE/PFA programs (12%).



2012 - 13 Overall Technical Assistance Ratings



Technical Assistance Follow Up

Within the strand of Technical Assistance, individuals indicated that the Resource Specialist supported the practitioner in “increasing their knowledge, skills, and awareness of family centered, effective practices,” “developing their abilities to support children’s education,” and “increasing their use of problem-solving strategies.” Overall general comments from TA Follow-up indicate the Resource Specialists provided practical suggestions.

There were several positive outcomes including:

- increasing awareness of supporting children in inclusive environments
- increasing awareness of supporting positive social emotional skills
- increasing awareness of supporting the acquisition/use of knowledge and skill
- increasing awareness of supporting the use of appropriate behaviors

In addition to increasing knowledge and skills in supporting young children with disabilities, the overarching intent is to provide technical assistance in a manner that allows early childhood practitioners to apply this new knowledge and skills.

As the graph below illustrates, data gathered from the Technical Assistance Follow Up survey indicated that participants across all programs reported that they were able to “apply the knowledge and skill with their family or in their work,” “deepen their new knowledge and skills in supporting the development of children with disabilities,” and “increase their knowledge of how to access information and resources.”

“This conference was the best by far that I have ever attended! I was able to utilize & implement countless activities my next day back to work!”

— Region IV

2012 - 13 Overall Technical Assistance Follow Up Ratings



Funding Opportunities

The statewide STAR NET system awarded 94 funding opportunities to professionals and family members. Primary categories of funding for 2012–2013 included: Professional Fellowships (n=61), Family Fellowships (n=27), and Study Groups (n=6). All funding recipients were required to complete an evaluation of the funding support. Five of the six regions were able to conduct evaluations of their funding efforts. Return rates ranged from 62% to 100% with an overall statewide return rate of 80%. In total, 75 funding evaluation forms were completed. Awardees who received financial support and completed the evaluation forms provided positive ratings similar to the trends over the past four years. Scores across the state all had a mean around 3.5 out of 4.0 (1–Strongly Disagree and 4–Strongly Agree).



Within the Funding strand, there were positive ratings in the five expected outcomes, including:

- Increasing access to funding opportunities that support ISBE initiatives, Illinois Early Learning Standards, Illinois Teaching Standards, inclusion, family-centered, and/or evidence-based practices by families and early childhood education and care providers.
- Deepening knowledge and enhancing skills of families and early childhood education and care providers related to ISBE initiatives, Illinois Early Learning Standards, Illinois Teaching Standards, inclusion, family-centered, and/or evidence-based practices due to their accessing of funding opportunities.

When all regional data are aggregated, respondents reported higher levels of agreement with the following funding indicators:

- (1) increased my skills,
- (2) increased my knowledge, and
- (3) helped me meet the Illinois Early Learning Standards and the Illinois Teaching Standards.

Collaboration

Collaboration is an essential element in supporting families who have children with disabilities. Therefore, interagency collaboration is essential in order to offer the full range of supports needed to assist families and providers.

Regional directors and staff members from STAR NET provide leadership and collaboration with a multitude of initiatives and agencies across the state of Illinois. Key collaborations maintained or developed over the 2012–2013 period were with, but are not limited to, the following:

- Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Stakeholder Committee
- Hearing and Vision Early Intervention Outreach
- Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children
- Illinois Division for Early Childhood
- Illinois Early Intervention training
- Illinois Early Learning Council
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)
- Illinois Resource Center: Early Childhood
- Illinois State Board of Education Division of Early Childhood
- Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Center (ISTAC)
- National Alliance on Mental Health Illinois
- Sharing A Vision Statewide Early Childhood Conference
- Statewide LRE Stakeholders Committee
- Statewide Transition Guidance Committee
- Strengthening Families Illinois

Early Childhood Outcomes Faculty Summit

Illinois STARNET in collaboration with the Early Childhood Outcomes Stakeholders Committee Faculty Training Sub-Committee sponsored a Faculty Summit in April 2013. Fifteen faculty members from four-year universities and five faculty from two-year colleges participated in the event. An overview of ECO was presented by Pamela Reising Rechner from the Illinois State Board of Education Early Childhood Division. A panel of three faculty members discussed examples of how they integrate ECO content into their coursework. Two of the committee members who are also faculty presented information about the Illinois ECO forms and the rating process. Participants also worked in small group to list websites and activities to use as resources in coursework. The resulting resource list and activity suggestions will be available on the ISBE website at a later date. Quotes from the participants included:

It was good to learn more about competencies new teachers should have in order to participate in team meetings and complete the Early Childhood Outcomes program entry and exit forms.

The best part was the interactive piece where faculty worked together to locate resources and figure out how to make them fit into different courses.

Enjoyed learning about what is currently done in other institutions of higher education.

2012–13 Evaluation Key Findings

Results from the multiple sources of data collected continues to suggest that STAR NET has had a significant effect on early childhood education personnel who serve children and families across the state of Illinois. Key findings from 2012-13 STAR NET evaluation support impact data on several of the intermediate outcomes including the following:

- Increased the knowledge and skills of families and early childhood education and care providers.
- Participants indicated that the professional development opportunities were well organized, delivered by experienced presenters or consultants, and that the content provided was applicable to their family and/or work.
- Participants were able to provide quantitative as well as qualitative data indicating that they have enhanced their knowledge as well as applied the knowledge and skills obtained through a STAR NET sponsored professional development opportunity.

STAR NET continues to evolve in their approach to training and technical assistance to account for broader changes in the field. As more practitioners and families are getting comfortable learning through distance education approaches, an increased effort is being placed on webinars. Accordingly, additional efforts are being made to systematically evaluate the impact from trainings offered in this format. As this report highlights, training and training follow up ratings remain high in STAR NET supported webinars. Additionally, STAR NET is continuing to target more family focused trainings. To determine the specific impact on these Family trainings, additional tools were designed to capture the impact of STAR NET services for families. As this report highlights, family members give extremely high ratings to the support provided by STAR NET.

While STAR NET provides a great deal of professional development internal to the project, they also play a critical linkage to other systems that are assisting in the professional development of practitioners and families. This collaboration promotes the dissemination of evidence-based practices in a systematic and comprehensive manner across the state of Illinois through strategic partnerships with numerous organizations and agencies.

STAR NET leadership continues to ensure that all offerings through the project are driven by current research and exemplary practices in professional development. For over a decade, the STAR NET system has been reexamining their evaluation design to ensure that it matches the broader changes in the field and larger state and federal context. In addition, work continues to ensure connections to both the state and federal reporting requirements (APR, SPP, ECO). What remains clear is that the services provided by STAR NET are in high demand, are rated as high quality, and are demonstrating deep impact on professionals who support families and young children with special needs across the state of Illinois.

"I'm so thankful for STAR NET! You all provide great trainings! I am always so impressed with the speakers."

— Region IV

"I enjoyed the webinar and chats and the ideas expressed! Lots of information & ideas to improve ways to engage children outdoors & create an outdoor learning environment."

— Teacher

"The training had a great variety of activities and research."

— Administrator

"It was great how the trainer used activities that were embedded into discussions. The trainer was very knowledgeable about the topic."

— Speech Language Pathologist