



Minnesota Department of Human Services

Minnesota
Department
of Education

An Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System

A report to the Minnesota Legislature



Prepared by the Minnesota Department of Human Services
and the Minnesota Department of Education

March 2011

Minnesota Statutes, section 4, subd. 124D.142, requires the following:

In planning a statewide quality rating and improvement system framework, the state shall use evaluation results of the Minnesota quality rating system rating tool in use in fiscal year 2008 to recommend:

- (1) a framework of a common set of child outcome and program standards for a voluntary statewide quality rating and improvement system;
- (2) a plan to link future funding to the framework; and
- (3) a plan for how the state will realign existing state and federal administrative resources to implement the voluntary quality rating and improvement system framework.

The following is an estimate of the cost incurred by the Departments of Education and Human Services in preparation of this report:

Contractors facilitated a public comment process and provided expert consultation on draft quality rating and improvement system program standards and indicators.

The following is an estimate of the cost incurred by the Departments of Education and Human Services in preparation of this report:

Participation in cross-agency workgroup: \$24,796

Report research and development: \$55,942

TOTAL: \$80,738

The departments would like to express appreciation for the use of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funds made available by the Early Childhood Advisory Committee for the public input and content expert processes used during the preparation of this report. In addition, the departments would like to thank all of the organizations that helped organize, publicize and provide space for the public input process. The departments want to especially thank all of the attendees who provided invaluable perspectives and insight.

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Executive Summary

The 2009 Minnesota Legislature established a Quality Rating and Improvement System and directed the state to use evaluation results from the Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System pilot to recommend: 1) a framework of a common set of child outcome and program standards for a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System; 2) a plan to link future funding to the Quality Rating and Improvement System; and 3) a plan for how the state will realign existing and federal administrative resources to implement the Quality Rating and Improvement System. (See Appendix A for a copy of Minnesota Statutes section 124D.142.)

The recommendations in this report include:

- Recommendation 1: The Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress for children ages birth-to-3 and 3-to-5 are Minnesota's child outcome standards and should be used as a foundation for a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- Recommendation 2: Use the proposed Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators from Table I in Minnesota's statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.
 - Recommendation 2a: Use a block scoring structure for the Quality Rating and Improvement System ratings process.
 - Recommendation 2b: Include the Environment Rating Scales and Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation tools in the rating process.
 - Recommendation 2c: Address child care accreditation, Head Start and public school pre-kindergarten program requirements during a transition period.
- Recommendation 3: Use the guidance provided in Table II when considering how to link and realign existing state and federal administrative resources to implement a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System framework.
- Recommendation 4: When planning for future funding for a Quality Rating and Improvement System, consider the following questions:
 - What is the impact on access to direct services if funds are reduced/eliminated and redirected to supports for improving quality?
 - Who are the populations served relative to the funding source? For example, Child Care Development Fund resources are primarily intended for low-income working families.
 - What are the limitations of the funding source? Some funding sources will be more appropriate for certain aspects of a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
 - How can blended funding strategies be used to most effectively support a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

Introduction

The 2009 Minnesota Legislature established a Quality Rating and Improvement System and directed the state to use evaluation results from the Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System pilot to recommend: 1) a framework of a common set of child outcome and program standards for a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System, 2) a plan to link future funding to the Quality Rating and Improvement System, and 3) a plan for how the state will realign existing and federal administrative resources to implement the Quality Rating and Improvement System. (See Appendix A for a copy of Minnesota Statutes section 124D.142.) The Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education developed the recommendations required in statute.

This report is organized into the following sections:

- Background.
- Common set of child outcome standards.
- A common set of early childhood program standards and indicators for a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- Linking and realigning future early childhood funding to a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- Summary of recommendations and conclusion.

The Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council has also been directed to make recommendations to the governor and Legislature on child outcome standards and early childhood program standards. For more information, see the Council's 2010 Annual Report at <http://www.education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/EarlyLearning/documents/Report/018004.pdf>.

Background

As required by statute, recommendations in this report consider evaluation results of Parent Aware, the Minnesota voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System pilot. The Parent Aware pilot has supported efforts to improve the school readiness of children ages birth to 5 by offering a rating system that identifies, recognizes and supports quality in early care and education for licensed child care programs, Head Start programs and public school pre-kindergarten programs.

Parent Aware started in 2007 in four geographic locations: the city of Saint Paul, North Minneapolis, Wayzata School District, and Blue Earth and Nicollet counties. In April 2009, the North Minneapolis pilot area was expanded to the entire city of Minneapolis. Beginning in July

2010, School Readiness Connections programs serving Child Care Assistance Program children were required to participate in Parent Aware. These 14 School Readiness Connections programs are located throughout the state.

The Parent Aware pilot was funded initially by the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation with additional support provided by the Department of Human Services using federal Child Care Development Fund quality funds. The department also modified some existing grant contracts with Minnesota Child Care Resource & Referral agencies to support implementation of the pilot through provision of quality improvement supports. The Greater Twin Cities United Way added funding to extend the pilot to the entire city of Minneapolis in 2009. Funding from the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation ended in June 2010; the Minnesota Legislature directed the Department of Human Services to use Child Care Development Fund resources available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to continue the pilot through June 30, 2011.

Parent Aware guiding principles:

- Ensure more children are ready for kindergarten.
- Provide parents with transparent, understandable and measurable consumer information about program quality.
- Provide resources so that all parents can access and afford quality programs.
- Create a voluntary system that builds on the foundation of Minnesota child care licensing.
- Build on the strengths of the workforce by providing training and education that will help programs attain the Parent Aware quality indicators.
- Provide program improvement grants to help programs reach higher levels of quality.
- Promote accountability for increased private and public investments by using program quality indicators that research links to positive child outcomes.

Parent Aware Pilot Rating Process

Programs participating in Parent Aware have received star ratings using a one- to four-star point system based on quality indicators. For non-accredited child care programs — both child care centers

Milestones in the Development of a Minnesota Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

2004 – QRIS task force established

2005 – QRIS implementation plan released by the task force

2006 – Child Trends conducted field test of QRIS

2006 – Minnesota Legislature passed bill to pilot QRIS

2006 – Governor Pawlenty vetoed the QRIS bill and directed DHS and MDE to work together on developing QRIS

2007 – MELF launches Parent Aware pilot in collaboration with DHS and MDE

2007 – Child Trends selected to evaluate Parent Aware pilot

2009 – Minnesota Legislature establishes QRIS and directs DHS and MDE to recommend a framework

2011 – DHS and MDE release report recommending framework for a revised QRIS

and licensed family child care homes — a full rating process was used to develop a composite score of how programs rated on four categories of indicators: Family Partnerships, Teaching Materials and Strategies, Tracking Learning, Training and Education. In addition, licensed child care programs must be in good standing with the Minnesota child care licensing standards in order to score higher than one star. (See Appendices B and C for the Parent Aware pilot indicators.) Accredited child care programs, Head Start and public school-based pre-kindergarten programs did not go through a full rating process, but were granted an automatic 4 star rating. All program ratings have been made publicly available at www.parentawareratings.org. Programs have been given outreach materials and advice on using their ratings as a way to help educate parents and families about high quality in early childhood care and education.

Common Set of Child Outcome Standards

Minnesota Statutes section 124D.142 directed the state to recommend a common set of child outcome standards as a foundation for a voluntary statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Definition

The departments recommend the following definition of common child standards:

A common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children within a context of shared responsibility and accountability for helping children meet these expectations.

Child outcome standards, also known as early learning standards or early learning guidelines, describe the generally accepted knowledge and skills that children should have prior to kindergarten entry. Because young children develop in different ways and at different rates, child outcome standards are broad statements of developmentally appropriate expectations and are best used with an appreciation for the uniqueness of each child's individual development. Child outcome standards can be used to inform development of policy and programs such as a Quality Rating and Improvement System, as well as teacher/caregiver training and education, learning activities, and child progress assessment used in early childhood settings. In addition, child outcome standards can be used by parents to understand and support their child's development.

Recommendation 1:

The Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress for children ages birth-to-3 and 3-to-5 are Minnesota's child outcome standards and should be used as a foundation for a Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Minnesota's common child outcome standards were developed previous to this report, with contributions from the Minnesota Departments of Human Services, Education and Health. These child outcome standards are called *Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress* for young children ages birth to 3 and 3 to 5, and are used to inform policies and programs across early childhood settings. The Early Childhood Advisory Council has also endorsed the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress as Minnesota's child outcome standards.

The *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards* were developed in 2000 and revised in 2005. These outcomes are the generally accepted developmental expectations for children at the end of their fourth year, developed to guide work with children throughout the preschool years.

The learning domains addressed in the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress for children ages 3 to 5 are: physical and motor development, creativity and the arts, approaches to learning, cognitive development, language and literacy development, and social and emotional development. Examples of behaviors that show development in each of these learning domains include:

- Uses eye-hand coordination to complete a variety of tasks (physical and motor development).
- Shows interest and respect for the creative work of self and others (creativity and the arts).
- Uses new ways or novel strategies to solve problems or explore objects (approaches to learning).
- Demonstrates one-to-one correspondence between objects and numbers (cognitive development).
- Engages in writing using letter-like symbols to make letters or words (language and literacy development).
- Demonstrates increasing self-direction and independence (social and emotional development).

The *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to 3* were created in 2007 by the Departments of Human Services and Health. This version includes information on the sequence of developmental expectations for children ages birth-to-3. The learning domains in this version include physical and motor development, cognitive development, language development and communication, and social and emotional development. Examples of behaviors that show development in each of these learning domains include:

- Controls small muscles in hand when doing simple tasks (physical and motor development).
- Experiments with different uses for objects (cognitive development).
- Imitates sounds, gestures or words (language development and communication).

- Uses imitation or pretend play to learn new roles or relationships (social and emotional development).

Use of Child Outcome Standards in Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System

As noted above, child outcome standards provide an important foundation for early childhood programs and policies. Alignment with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress was one of several key criteria used by the departments in developing recommended common program standards and Quality Rating and Improvement System indicators. For example, to achieve level three or higher in the proposed system, programs must use a curriculum that is aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress and complete approved training on implementing curriculum. A curriculum is aligned if the developmental areas in the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress are identified and supported in the curriculum.

Common Early Childhood Program Standards and Quality Rating and Improvement System Indicators

Minnesota Statutes section 124D.142 directed the state to recommend a common set of program standards and indicators for a voluntary statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Common program standards across different types of early childhood programs — child care, Head Start and pre-kindergarten — can play an important role in Minnesota's early childhood system beyond a Quality Rating and Improvement System by identifying shared expectations linked to outcomes for young children. Examples of potential uses of common program standards for different stakeholder groups include:

- For early childhood teachers and caregivers:
 - To guide curriculum planning, teaching strategies, and assessment of children's progress.
 - To provide focus for staff training and program development.
 - To support linkages across program types to more effectively coordinate services for families.
- For parents:
 - To build awareness of the program characteristics necessary to support their children's development.
 - To provide information needed to choose a high quality setting.
- For policymakers:
 - To assess alignment of public policies with program standards.
 - To highlight shared goals and priorities across different types of early childhood programs.

Prior to this report, there was not an identified common set of program standards across types of early childhood programs. The process to develop program standards and indicators occurred in five phases:

1. Initial development by the Departments of Human Services and Education.
2. Review by content experts.
3. Child Trends Parent Aware evaluation report.
4. Public input process.
5. Final recommendations on Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators.

After each phase, the departments reviewed collected feedback and incorporated it into the recommendations.

Framework Development

To develop a set of common program standards and Quality Rating and Improvement System indicators, the departments developed a conceptual hierarchy for the Quality Rating and Improvement System, defined each level of the hierarchy, and created criteria for use in developing elements of the hierarchy (see Chart I).

Categories of Standards

Definition: A grouping of program standards that logically fit together

To develop categories of standards, the departments reviewed the research and evaluations of other states' quality rating and improvement systems, the Parent Aware categories, Minnesota's standards for School Readiness programs, the *Ten Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs* adopted by the Early Childhood Advisory Council,¹ as well as early childhood standards of widely recognized organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Head Start.



Chart I

The following categories of standards were developed through the review of the resources:

- Physical Health and Wellbeing.
- Family Partnerships.
- Teaching and Relationships.
- Assessment of Child Progress
- Professional Development
- Program Planning and Management.

¹ The Ten Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs were created by two early childhood research experts, Arthur Reynolds, University of Minnesota, and Susan Neuman, University of Michigan. The Elements were presented and adopted during the Minnesota Governor's Summit on School Readiness.

Program Standards

The departments recommend the following definition of common child standards:

A component within a category that identifies the features of early childhood programs that, based on research, have been shown to ensure the conditions in which children are more likely to learn.

To draft program standards, the next level of detail in this hierarchy was to develop screening criteria by reviewing alignment of the standards for Minnesota's School Readiness program, Head Start Performance Standards, child care licensing requirements, the Parent Aware indicators, and some child care accreditation standards, again using the Ten Essential Elements as a framework. These criteria include:

1. Standards are built on, or connect to, one of the research-based Ten Essential Elements for Effective Early Care and Education Programs from the 2006 Governor's Summit on School Readiness.
2. Standards are based on research connecting the standard with improved school readiness, especially for at-risk children.
3. Standards apply to all types of early learning programs that serve children ages birth to 5, including child care centers, licensed family child care homes, school-based and private preschools and Head Start programs.
4. Standards are meaningful for parents, providers, policymakers and the public.

Indicators

The departments recommend the following definition of common child standards:

A component of a standard such as an outcome, condition, process, role, and function, which can be observed and measured, and used to determine the extent to which standards are met.

After the standards were developed, indicators were drafted using department-developed criteria:

1. Indicators are related to positive child outcomes, especially for children at-risk,² and demonstrated through research or best practices as identified by national experts.
2. Indicators are observable, documentable, and valid measures that quantify the achievement of the desired outcome, i.e., they substantiate the extent to which standards are met.
3. Indicators requiring self-reporting documentation are verifiable, easily understood and implemented so that program staff involved in data collection will be motivated to participate in data collection and incorporate data results into program planning and improvement.

² The Minnesota Early Childhood Advisory Council defines *at-risk* as: children who are in families with low incomes and/or children who experience multiple risk factors, placing them "at-risk for academic failure."

4. Indicators are meaningful at the system level, beyond basic child care licensing standards/regulations, and linked to state priorities and policies.
5. Indicators are culturally sensitive to race, ethnicity and context.
6. Indicators have wide acceptance by, and are meaningful to, decision makers, researchers, practitioners and families.

When drafting the indicators, the departments also assessed the degree to which a specific indicator related to a program standard, and whether there was a logical progression of indicators within and across program standards and categories.

Content Expert Review

The content experts addressed the following specific questions in their reviews:

- To what extent do the standards meet the identified criteria?
- What gaps, if any, exist in the standards?
- Are there draft standards that should not be included in a Quality Rating and Improvement System and why?
- What gaps, if any, exist in the indicators?
- What are suggestions for best practice in objectively and authentically measuring indicators?
- Is infant/toddler care represented appropriately?

(See Appendix D for a list of the content experts and a summary of their feedback.)

Parent Aware Evaluation Report

The departments used results from the *Parent Aware Year 3 Evaluation Report* in the process of developing program standards and indicators. The evaluator, Child Trends, analyzed data from the second and third year of the Parent Aware pilot to understand patterns of participation and scoring on the rating tool, and the effectiveness of implementation strategies. The goal of the evaluation was to inform decisions about future statewide implementation of a Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Public Input Process

The departments used results from the research review, examples from other states, the Parent Aware evaluation, feedback from the Early Learning Standards Committee of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, and content expert feedback to create a next draft of the Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators for public review and comment.

In December 2010, the consultant facilitated a series of six public meetings throughout the state, including a meeting with specific communities of color. An online feedback survey was also used to facilitate input. (See Appendix E for a detailed report submitted by the contractors on the

public input process and the key issues raised by the public.) In response to public input, the departments made significant modifications to the proposed program standards and Quality Rating and Improvement System indicators, including:

- Reducing the number of categories
- Reducing the number of indicators
- Reviewing and refining indicators designed to increase the number of programs providing culturally sensitive caregiving (i.e., authentic observation, orientation meetings, training requirements on working with children of different cultures, communicating program information in parent’s primary language).

Recommendations on Quality Rating and Improvement System Categories, Standards and Indicators

Recommendation 2:

Use the proposed Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators from Table I in Minnesota’s statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.

The following is a snapshot of Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System framework. Standards and indicators are listed under each of the four recommended categories. The standards are in the left-hand column and the indicators are listed in the columns to the right. Indicators are separated by level under “level 1,” “level 2,” etc. Programs must meet all of the indicators in level 1 for all categories in order to achieve 1 star, all of the indicators in level 2 to achieve 2 stars, etc. Programs will also be able to achieve a star level by category, based on the highest level for which they have achieved all of the indicators listed. There will be additional work needed before the indicators are implemented to create materials by program type so that it is clear how programs, particularly family child care, can access the indicators.

Table I: Minnesota Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards and Indicators

CATEGORY: Physical Health and Wellbeing

Programs provide nutritious meals, opportunities for physical activity, and linkages to supports for families related to physical, oral and social-emotional health. Children’s physical health and wellbeing are a critical foundation for them to be able to engage and learn.

Standards	Level 1 INDICATORS*	Level 2 INDICATORS*	Level 3 INDICATORS*	Level 4 INDICATORS*	Level 5 INDICATORS*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes development of healthy habits through a balance of nutrition and physical activity Promotes child safety, injury prevention, and a learning-rich environment that is free of hazards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides families with contact information for the following services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early childhood and developmental screening Vision, dental, hearing and social-emotional screening Mental health Special education 	<p>All indicators under Level 1, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides families with local contact information for family supports, such as child care assistance, medical assistance and public health services Has scored a 3 or higher on the appropriate Environment Rating Scale** <p><u>OR</u></p> <p>Improvement plan is submitted (improvement plan option allowed for one rating cycle only)</p>	<p>All indicators under Level 2, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed approved training on child nutrition <p><u>OR</u></p> <p>The program participates in the Minnesota Child and Adult Food Program</p>		<p>All indicators under Level 3, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists families in accessing supports such as child care assistance, medical assistance, and public health services through one or more of the following: on-site staff, consultants, volunteers, a local collaboration or other cooperative agreement

* **Pre-requisite for licensed family child care and center-based programs:** Be licensed and have no negative actions. Negative actions include: maltreatment determinations, conditional license, suspensions, temporary immediate suspensions, and revocations. Fines are not included.

** Note that this indicator is also related to the Teaching and Relationships category. There are three Environment Rating Scales (ERS) that measure overall program quality. The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale is used in infants and toddler classrooms. The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) is used in home-based settings with mixed ages. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) is used in classrooms with children ages 3 to 5. They are nationally normed, valid, reliable tools. The ERS tools address quality around personal care, language and reasoning, interaction, activities, furnishings and display, program structure, and parent and staff needs.

CATEGORY: Teaching and Relationships

Caregivers/teachers are knowledgeable in child development and support children’s learning through experiences aimed at boosting their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. These experiences are provided through strong relationships with children and their families and through effective, individualized child-adult interactions.

Standards	Level 1 INDICATORS*	Level 2 INDICATORS*	Level 3 INDICATORS*	Level 4 INDICATORS*	Level 5 INDICATORS*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates regularly with families and links them to parent education services Supports children’s transitions to kindergarten Promotes and supports the learning and development of all children, including children who are linguistically and culturally diverse, and children with disabilities Demonstrates effectiveness through intentional interactions with children Provides individualized instruction that promotes development and helps close the learning gap so that children perform at age level or higher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides families with contact information for one or more local family education options (including, but not limited to, ECFE) All caregivers/lead teachers have completed at least 8 hours of approved, basic child development training 	<p>All indicators under Level 1, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers orientation meetings for new parents that include a discussion about their preferences, including those related to cultural norms and traditions Uses lesson plans and a daily schedule All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 8 hours of approved training on the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress Has scored a 2 on all CLASS** domains <p><u>OR</u></p> <p>Has submitted an improvement plan for approval (improvement plan option allowed for one rating cycle only)</p>	<p>All indicators under Level 2, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a curriculum that is aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress, and has completed approved training on implementing curriculum CLASS scores: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score of 4 or higher on CLASS Emotional Support domain Score of 2.5 on CLASS Instructional Support domain Score of 3.5 or higher on CLASS Classroom Organization domain All caregivers/lead teachers have had at least 4 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on children’s developmental disabilities, special health care needs, and behavioral challenges All caregivers/lead teachers have had at least 4 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on supporting social-emotional, language, literacy, mathematical thinking and physical development in young children 	<p>All indicators under Level 3, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates program information in parent’s primary language (e.g., through on-site staff, qualified volunteers, an interpreter service, or translated materials) CLASS scores: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score of 5 or higher on CLASS Emotional Support domain Score of 3 on CLASS Instructional Support domain Score of 4.5 or higher on CLASS Classroom Organization domain All caregivers/lead teachers have had at least 8 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on children’s developmental disabilities, special health care needs, and behavioral challenges Teachers/caregivers have had at least 8 hours of training or equivalent coaching on supporting social-emotional, language, literacy, mathematical thinking and physical development in young children 	<p>All indicators under Level 4, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If preschool or toddler classroom: <p>CLASS scores:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Score of 6 or higher on CLASS Emotional Support domain Score of 3.5 on CLASS Instructional Support domain Score of 5.5 or higher on CLASS Classroom Organization domain

* **Pre-requisite for licensed family child care and center-based programs:** Be licensed and have no negative actions. Negative actions include: maltreatment determinations, conditional license, suspensions, temporary immediate suspensions and revocations. Fines are not included.

** The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observation tool tested in more than 3,000 preschool-through-third grade classrooms. CLASS focuses on the teacher interactions that really matter for children’s development. It assesses a classroom teacher’s strengths and areas for growth across a wide variety of topics. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System provides a reliable, valid assessment of effective interactions. Research conducted in more than 3,000 classrooms concludes that from pre-kindergarten programs into the third grade, children in classrooms with higher CLASS ratings realize greater gains in achievement and social skill development. The CLASS tool includes three domains of quality: emotional support, instructional support and classroom organization. A toddler version of the CLASS is currently in the process of being validated. The infant version of the CLASS is under development.

CATEGORY: Assessment of Child Progress

Programs assess children's progress toward achieving the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be fully prepared for school success. Families are partners in the assessment process, ensuring sensitivity to children's culture. Assessment information is used to individualize instruction and enhance overall program development.

Standards	Level 1 INDICATORS*	Level 2 INDICATORS*	Level 3 INDICATORS*	Level 4 INDICATORS*	Level 5 INDICATORS*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses children by observing and tracking their developmental progress using a research-based assessment tool, and uses those results to individualize instruction Includes families in the assessment process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed training on authentic observation practices Observes children regularly and records information at least monthly 	<p>All indicators under Level 1, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shares with families observation summaries prepared using authentic observation practices 	<p>All indicators under Level 2, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts assessment using approved tool in at least two domains with all children at least once per year All caregivers/lead teachers have completed training on the approved assessment tool used in the program Shares assessment results and obtains input from families about a child's progress at least once per year 	<p>All indicators under Level 3, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts assessment using an approved tool for all children twice a year in at least the following domains: social-emotional development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking and physical development Shares assessment results and sets joint goals for children's progress with families during conferences at least twice per year If a child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Interagency Family Services Plan (IFSP), shares assessment results with team with family's permission. For a child with a special need who is receiving specialty services (i.e., physical or occupational therapist), shares assessment results with service providers with family's permission 	

* **Pre-requisite for licensed family child care and center-based programs:** Be licensed and have no negative actions. Negative actions include: maltreatment determinations, conditional license, suspensions, temporary immediate suspensions and revocations. Fines are not included.

CATEGORY: Professional Development

Caregivers/teachers are equipped to promote and support children’s learning and development by having the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment.

Standards	Level 1 INDICATORS*	Level 2 INDICATORS*	Level 3 INDICATORS*	Level 4 INDICATORS*	Level 5 INDICATORS*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Caregivers/lead teachers, program directors/administrators, education coordinators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have formal education degrees or credentials in early childhood education or a related field ■ Are engaged in ongoing professional development to ensure current knowledge and skills ■ Program directors/administrators have specialized preparation in program administration or business management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All caregivers/lead teachers have submitted verified training and professional development credentials 	<p>All indicators under Level 1, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All caregivers/lead teachers have professional development plans 	<p>All indicators under Level 2, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All lead teachers/caregivers have completed at least one of the following, or higher: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 8 early childhood-related, approved semester credits ■ Child Development Associate (CDA) from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition ■ 40 hours of approved coaching/mentoring ■ All caregivers/lead teachers have completed training in working with families from different cultures and socio-economic levels 	<p>All indicators under Level 3, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For child care centers, school-based preschool programs and Head Start: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education coordinator, director, or lead administrator has a baccalaureate degree with at least 24 early childhood-related, approved semester credits 	<p>All indicators under Level 4, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For child care centers only: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Director has a director’s credential

* **Pre-requisite for licensed family child care and center-based programs:** Be licensed and have no negative actions. Negative actions include: maltreatment determinations, conditional license, suspensions, temporary immediate suspensions, and revocations. Fines are not included.

Additional recommendations about the Quality Rating and Improvement System framework

The departments' proposed recommended framework of program standards and indicators include the following additional recommendations:

Recommendation 2a:

Use a block scoring structure for the ratings process.

The departments recommend that Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System use a block scoring structure, with one to five star levels possible, with more stars indicating higher quality. The ratings are based on whether or not a program has met all of the indicators required at each level. The recommended set of indicators is based on a block structure.

The block structure is recommended because it allows for greater transparency of program quality for parents, which is necessary if the quality rating and improvement system is to provide effective information for consumers. The block scoring structure allows for greater consistency of quality across programs. All programs should complete the same indicators within each standard category at a specific level. This differs from the point system used in the Parent Aware pilot. In that system, programs receive points within a standard category and those points are averaged across standards categories to achieve a rating. This allows a program to be scored very low on some indicators, yet the program can receive a high rating overall. While this structure permits some flexibility, it creates an uneven picture of quality, and makes it very difficult for parents to feel confident that the ratings represent the same levels of quality between programs.

A block structure weighs each item in a star level equally. It should be acknowledged that this may create some challenges for programs to achieve a higher rating. However, a block structure will promote more careful documentation of all information needed for each indicator on the part of programs committed to reaching higher levels.

The recommendation to use a block structure was informed by the experience of administering the Parent Aware pilot. In particular, the use and complexity of a ratings structure based on points introduced more opportunities for errors in the ratings process than would likely exist in a block structure.

Recommendation 2b:

Include the Environment Rating Scales and Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation tools in the rating process.

There are three ways to gather evidence of program quality in a Quality Rating and Improvement System:

- Self-report – Programs verify that they are implementing a particular policy or approach.
- Documentation – Programs provide evidence that an indicator of quality has been met using a sample (i.e., copy of a lesson plan, a page from a policy manual, a written plan for carrying out a procedure).
- Observation – Trained outside observers conduct an observation, typically using a nationally normed tool or a scale with sound psychometric properties of validity and reliability. These tools assess the existence of practices that *may be reported inaccurately or are impossible* to assess reliably through self-reporting or documentation.

The departments recommend use of the scores of two observation tools in a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System: the Environment Rating Scales and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System. These two observation tools capture quality by examining the environment in which a child spends his/her day and the interactions between children and adults in the program/classroom, providing detailed feedback for programs to identify areas for improvement. If a goal of the quality rating and improvement system is to improve the school readiness of at-risk children, then evidence of how well a provider/teacher interacts with a child is critical to any assessment of quality. Observations would be conducted in programs using each of these tools; the scores would be used as one of the indicators for a quality level. (See Levels 2-5 in Table I for the specific minimum scores required on these observations tools at each level.)

The Environment Rating Scales is a set of three observation scales that vary depending on the setting. The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale is used in infants and toddler classrooms in center-based programs while the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale is used in classrooms with children ages 3 to 5. The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale is used in home-based settings with mixed ages. These tools address quality in the areas of personal care, language and reasoning, interaction, activities, furnishings and display, program structure, and parent and staff needs.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System, commonly known as “CLASS,” is an observation tool focused on teacher interactions that positively impact children’s development, tested in more than 3,000 preschool-through-third-grade classrooms, including Head Start programs. This tool includes three domains of quality: emotional support, instructional support and classroom organization. Research conducted on this observation tool concludes that from pre-kindergarten

programs into the third grade, children in classrooms with higher CLASS ratings realize greater gains in achievement and social skill development.

Linkages between observed quality using the Environment Rating Scale and CLASS and child progress were not found in The Parent Aware Year 3 evaluation. The report stated that the small sample size and study design of the evaluation made it challenging to demonstrate a linkage between observed quality using these observation tools and child progress. However, the evaluation cited national studies that found a linkage with large sample sizes. The Parent Aware Year 3 evaluation recommended that in a future Quality Rating and Improvement System, these tools should have more bearing on the final rating/score than was the case in the Parent Aware pilot.

Challenges that must be considered during implementation include the use of these tools in programs with:

- Different goals and purposes.
- A mix of different parent and child populations (age ranges, culture, ethnicity).
- Different settings (family child care or center-based).

The departments believe that observations can be conducted through reliable observers who are highly trained and tested, and through small adjustments to the tools (e.g., state notes) to ensure appropriate and consistent scoring across programs. This approach was used in the Parent Aware pilot and in many quality rating and improvement systems around the country.

Recommendation 2c:

Address child care accreditation, Head Start and public school pre-kindergarten program requirements during a transition period.

During development of the recommended standards and indicators, the departments were keenly aware of the need to avoid duplication with program requirements that already exist in law through child care licensing, Head Start performance standards, and School Readiness programs. This is a complex challenge because program requirements flow from the purpose of the program, and the specific purposes of the included programs differ. In child care, licensing requirements set a minimal level of quality needed to ensure health and safety for children in care, while Head Start and School Readiness program standards are designed to improve the school readiness of at-risk children. Further complicating the landscape are multiple accreditation standards that many child care programs voluntarily pursue to improve overall quality.

During the Parent Aware pilot, this challenge was overcome by developing indicators for a full rating that did not duplicate licensing standards, and by allowing for “automatic” ratings for

accredited child care, Head Start and School Readiness programs. Crosswalks of the various program standards demonstrated substantial alignment between the Parent Aware pilot indicators, the Head Start performance standards and the School Readiness program requirements. Because of this alignment and the desire to increase the number of programs available to participate in the pre-kindergarten allowance and early childhood scholarship initiatives, Head Start and School Readiness programs, and programs meeting certain accreditation standards automatically achieved the highest star level without being fully rated through Parent Aware.

During the process of developing Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators for this report, the departments made every effort to eliminate duplication with child care licensing requirements. However, with respect to duplication with Head Start, School Readiness and child care accreditation standards, the departments recommend that efforts be made while transitioning to the new statewide system to determine which indicators are automatically met by virtue of a program's existing set of standards. The departments expect that the number of indicators would be reduced for some program types once comparisons have been completed.

Linking and Realigning Early Childhood Funding to a Quality Rating and Improvement System

Recommendation 3:

Use the guidance provided in Table II when considering how to link and realign existing state and federal administrative resources to implement a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System framework.

The Departments of Human Services and Education were directed to create a plan for how the state will realign existing state and federal administrative resources to implement the voluntary quality rating system framework identified in this report. The chart below identifies components needed to implement this Quality Rating and Improvement System framework, along with information about realignment of funds and issues to consider prior to implementation.

The chart reflects components that would be present in a Quality Rating and Improvement System, but does not reflect costs of implementing each component. The cost of implementation will depend on timing of scaling up the system, the frequency of ratings, the extent to which on-site program observations are included in the ratings, the projected participation rate of early childhood programs, and the area of the state covered during an expansion phase.

Two sets of assumptions underlie the information in this section. First, we assume that a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System will include the proposed standards described in Table I of this report. If different standards and indicators were to be used, some items below would need to be revisited. Second, the funding information is made using components and activities listed in the chart below. These components and activities are typical of most quality rating and improvement systems in the United States, and were identified in the report titled “Minnesota QRIS Scaling Options,” completed in November 2009, for the Early Childhood Caucus of the Minnesota Legislature, and have been implemented to varying degrees in the Parent Aware pilot.

For some components below, federal funds have already been realigned during the Parent Aware pilot and could continue to be used in a statewide quality rating and improvement system. In SFY 2010, about \$1 million in federal Child Care Development Fund quality funds were aligned to support Parent Aware pilot components. Assuming these funds remain at current levels, these quality funds could continue to be aligned if a rating system continues.

Consideration should be given to the possible trade-offs that would occur if significant resources are shifted to support a quality rating and improvement system. Since participation is voluntary, using existing resources that are available statewide, and limiting resources to only participants is a trade-off that policymakers should note. Using only Child Care Development Fund resources to support a larger, statewide rating system may require trade-offs between supporting other child care quality activities and/or access to subsidies for low-income families.

Table II. Alignment of state and federal funds to support a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) framework

Activity	Considerations for continued alignment or realignment if QRIS expands statewide
<i>Component: Quality Assurance</i> <i>Methods used to verify, assess and/or monitor program’s compliance with quality standards</i>	
Rating process	Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function for child care programs.
On-site observations (using the Environment Rating Scale [ERS] and CLASS tools)	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function for child care programs.

Activity	Considerations for continued alignment or realignment if QRIS expands statewide
Professional development verification and documentation	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function for child care programs. Recommend continuation of this use of aligned funds for any verification and documentation provided through the Minnesota Professional Development Registry.
Child assessment tool review process	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function for child care programs. Recommend continuation of this use of aligned funds.
Component: Improvement supports <i>Professional development for practitioners, technical assistance for programs, and facility improvements.</i>	
Quality improvement supports	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function for child care programs.
Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and CLASS coaching	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot to provide this service for child care programs.
Accreditation facilitation services	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function for child care programs. Continued alignment would be applicable only if certain types of accreditation are accessed within a QRIS.
Scholarships for early childhood practitioners	CCDF quality funds are currently used to support provider participation in the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program and Child Development Associate (CDA) scholarships. If these funds are realigned to support a larger, statewide QRIS, consider giving practitioners higher priority to receive these scholarships if the programs they work in choose to participate in the QRIS.
Develop and deliver training aligned with the QRIS indicators	<p>CCDF quality funds are currently used to provide free or low-cost curriculum and assessment training for practitioners working in child care programs participating in the Parent Aware pilot.</p> <p>CCDF quality funds are also used to provide free business training to programs participating in the Parent Aware pilot.</p> <p>If alignment of CCDF quality funds is continued, consider supporting training on behavior guidance, cultural competency, and working with children with special needs. Alternatively, all trainings developed could be offered at full cost for all program types.</p>

Activity	Considerations for continued alignment or realignment if QRIS expands statewide
<p>Component: Incentives</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Incentives to practitioners – financial rewards available to early childhood program staff, linked to their program’s participation in a QRIS.</i> <i>Incentives to programs – financial rewards available to early childhood programs, linked to participation in a QRIS and to quality ratings.</i> <i>Incentives to consumers – funding directed by consumers (i.e., parents), which is designed to encourage the use of high-quality programs and provide incentives for early childhood programs to become rated.</i> 	
Incentives to practitioners	
Wage supplements for practitioners with higher education and credentials	CCDF quality funds are currently used to provide wage supplements to child care practitioners through the Retaining Early Educators through Attaining Incentives Now (R.E.E.T.A.I.N.) program. If these funds are realigned to support a larger, statewide QRIS, give child care practitioners higher priority to receive these wage supplements if the programs they work in choose to participate in the QRIS.
Incentives to programs and consumers	
Tiered reimbursement for programs serving children receiving child care assistance	<p>The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP Basic Sliding Fee, Minnesota Family Investment Program and Transition Year) is funded through a combination of federal CCDF and TANF funds, state appropriation and county funds. There is currently a rate differential provided for programs with certain approved accreditations or credentials. If this policy were expanded and aligned with a QRIS, policy could be changed to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provide higher reimbursement rates. Create flexible payment policies to programs that are highly rated. Focus could be on programs serving a large concentration of children on CCAP. <p>Note: Without an increase in base funds, fewer children would be served through CCAP, as the average cost per child would increase if the tiered reimbursement policy changes to align with a QRIS. This policy change requires legislative approval.</p>
<p>Component: Communications and marketing</p> <p><i>Outreach to increase parent and provider awareness and use of the QRIS, and engagement of other public and private funders.</i></p>	
Website for sharing ratings with parents	CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function. This activity may require redesign and/or development

Activity	Considerations for continued alignment or realignment if QRIS expands statewide
	of linkages to other data systems in a statewide QRIS, resulting in increased cost.
Marketing of rating system for parents and early childhood programs	<p>Private funds have been the primary source of funding for more intensive marketing efforts in the Parent Aware pilot.</p> <p>State general funds currently support the MNParentsKnow.org website and CCDF quality funds support the mnchildcare.org website. Consider continued use as one means of disseminating information about QRIS ratings information to parents, and that the state continue to engage private funders to assist with this component.</p> <p>Broad information dissemination about QRIS to parents and early childhood programs can be accomplished through existing state programs with little change to programs or services. However, more intensive marketing efforts, including development and production of print and other materials, media campaign, etc., would require additional resources and must be scaled up in a statewide QRIS.</p>
<p>Component: Data system <i>Information system requirements needed to collect, store, analyze and report ratings as well as to track and support program technical assistance and link to data in the state's professional development registry.</i></p>	
Rating database	<p>CCDF quality funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function.</p> <p>Note: This activity may require redesign and/or development of linkages to other data systems in a statewide QRIS, resulting in increased cost.</p>
<p>Component: Administration <i>Policy development, oversight, management and coordination to ensure consistent statewide implementation and accountability of public funds.</i></p>	
Policy and program oversight and contract management	<p>At DHS, CCDF funds are currently used in the Parent Aware pilot for this function.</p> <p>CCDF funds support Child Care Assistance Program staff time to implement policy changes, as well as technology support needed to change computer systems for payments if Parent Aware includes CCAP rate changes as incentives.</p>

Activity	Considerations for continued alignment or realignment if QRIS expands statewide
	Note: CCDF funds cannot be used for staff capacity at the Minnesota Department of Education to provide policy oversight needed for Head Start and school-based preschool programs. Other sources of funding are needed to provide additional administrative oversight.

Joint Agency Recommended Plan to Link Future Funding to a Quality Rating and Improvement System Framework

The legislation directed the state to create a plan for how to link future funding to a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System framework. Future funds could assist in funding all components of a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System expansion as identified in Table II above. The source of funds, purpose and intent would influence how funds might be used to support a rating system. In order to create a plan, additional information about both the funding and the rating system statewide implementation would be needed. Because of the challenges inherent in predicting sources of new funds, the two departments developed questions that should be considered if funds are considered for linking to a Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Recommendation 4:

When planning for future funding for a Quality Rating and Improvement System, consider the following questions:

- What is the impact on access to direct services if funds are reduced/eliminated and redirected to supports for improving quality?
- Who are the populations served relative to the funding source?
- What are the limitations of the funding source? Some funding sources will be more appropriate for certain aspects of a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- How can blended funding strategies be used to most effectively support a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

Summary of Recommendations and Conclusion

The Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education have developed the recommendations in this report as required under Minnesota Statutes section 124D142. In creating these recommendations, the departments made use of program, implementation and evaluation information from other states, state and national research, the current pilot evaluation study, national content expert reviews and an extensive public input process.

The recommendations in this report include:

- Recommendation 1: The Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress for children ages birth-to-3 and 3-to-5 are Minnesota's child outcome standards and should be used as a foundation for a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- Recommendation 2: Use the proposed Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators from Table I in Minnesota's statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.
 - Recommendation 2a: Use a block scoring structure for the Quality Rating and Improvement System ratings process.
 - Recommendation 2b: Include the Environment Rating Scales and Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation tools in the rating process.
 - Recommendation 2c: Address child care accreditation, Head Start and public school pre-kindergarten program requirements during a transition period.
- Recommendation 3: Use the guidance provided in Table II when considering how to link and realign existing state and federal administrative resources to implement a voluntary QRIS framework.
- Recommendation 4: When planning for future funding for a Quality Rating and Improvement System, consider the following questions:
 - What is the impact on access to direct services if funds are reduced/eliminated and redirected to supports for improving quality?
 - Who are the populations served relative to the funding source? For example, Child Care Development Fund funds are primarily intended for low-income working families.
 - What are the limitations of the funding source? Some funding sources will be more appropriate for certain aspects of a Quality Rating and Improvement System.
 - How can blended funding strategies be used to most effectively support a Quality Rating and Improvement System?

In addition to these recommendations, the departments suggest the following items be considered during and after transition to a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System:

1. Allow for a transition period prior to implementation of a new Quality Rating and Improvement System. The pilot is currently funded through June 2011. An extension of the pilot, while a new system is finalized, will provide needed time to prepare adequately for expansion using the proposed standards and indicators including:
 - a. ensuring clarity about the standards and indicators, and the evidence and documentation needed for meeting the indicators;
 - b. training skilled staff to conduct on-site Environment Rating Scale and CLASS observations and review program documentation;
 - c. reviewing and determining a level.

It will also require planning for revised parent and program outreach, and preparation of marketing and other informational materials.

2. Regular review of Quality Rating and Improvement System standards and indicators to reflect new developments in research and best practice.
3. Careful consideration of the consequences of realigning resources to support a new Quality Rating and Improvement System. Since a Quality Rating and Improvement System is conceptualized as a voluntary system, restricting funds to the participating providers may leave out some equally deserving providers who choose not to participate. Realignment of funds that currently support access of low-income families to child care subsidies may result in some children being left without substantial care.
4. Administration of a Quality Rating and Improvement System includes costs related to appeals, liability and assurances of quality control. The state or administering agency should consider a plan for these costs and resources needed.

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Appendix A

Sec. 4. [124D.142] **QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM.**

(a) There is established a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) framework to ensure that Minnesota's children have access to high-quality early learning and care programs in a range of settings so that they are fully ready for kindergarten by 2020.

Creation of a standards-based voluntary quality rating and improvement system includes:

(1) quality opportunities in order to improve the educational outcomes of children so that they are ready for school. The framework shall be based on the Minnesota quality rating system rating tool and a common set of child outcome and program standards and informed by evaluation results;

(2) a tool to increase the number of publicly funded and regulated early learning and care services in both public and private market programs that are high quality. If a program or provider chooses to participate, the program or provider will be rated and may receive public funding associated with the rating. The state shall develop a plan to link future early learning and care state funding to the framework in a manner that complies with federal requirements; and

(3) tracking progress toward statewide access to high-quality early learning and care programs, progress toward the number of low-income children whose parents can access quality programs, and progress toward increasing the number of children who are fully prepared to enter kindergarten.

(b) In planning a statewide quality rating and improvement system framework in paragraph (a), the state shall use evaluation results of the Minnesota quality rating system rating tool in use in fiscal year 2008 to recommend:

(1) a framework of a common set of child outcome and program standards for a voluntary statewide quality rating and improvement system;

(2) a plan to link future funding to the framework described in paragraph (a), clause (2); and

(3) a plan for how the state will realign existing state and federal administrative resources to implement the voluntary quality rating and improvement system framework. The state shall provide the recommendation in this paragraph to the early childhood education finance committees of the legislature by March 15, 2011.

(c) Prior to the creation of a statewide quality rating and improvement system in paragraph (a), the state shall employ the Minnesota quality rating system rating tool in use in fiscal year 2008 in the original Minnesota Early Learning Foundation pilot areas and additional pilot areas supported by private or public funds with its modification as a result of the evaluation results of the pilot project.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective July 1, 2009.

Parent Aware Rating Tool Indicators of Quality Family Child Care

Designed by child care providers, early learning professionals and parents, Minnesota's voluntary Parent Aware Rating Tool supports our state's children by creating a rating system that identifies, recognizes and celebrates quality in early education.

In order to be rated, a program must:

- Commit to participate (sign a contract).
- Complete orientation.
- Be licensed.
- Submit a program philosophy.
- Submit a health and safety checklist.

Child safety

Programs cannot receive more than 1 star if they have received a maltreatment determination in the past year or have had a negative licensing action, operated under a conditional license or received a fine in the past 6 months.

Quality rating

Points are awarded based on how well programs have incorporated best practices into their programs.

- Programs receive ratings of 1 star, 2 stars, 3 stars or 4 stars.
- Accredited programs completing appropriate documentation receive 4 stars.
- Ratings are assigned based on the number of points programs receive in the four quality indicator categories: family partnerships, tracking learning, teaching materials and strategies, and teacher training and education.

Family partnerships

- Have a formal process to collect and use feedback from parents.
- Communicate regularly with parents, as well as at in-take and for screening.
- Communicate with parents regarding children's transition to kindergarten and between milestones.
- Use individual plans for children's transition to kindergarten and between milestones.

Teaching materials and strategies

- Use research-based curriculum (must use an approved research-based curriculum to receive a rating of 3 or 4 stars).
- Promote an effective learning environment and child-adult interactions (involves Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale onsite assessment).

Tracking learning

- Use research-based child assessment tool to monitor child progress.
- Provide families with child assessment results.
- Use child assessment information to guide instruction and design goals for individual children.

Training and education

- Has recorded and documented his or her training and education in the Minnesota Professional Development Registry (<http://www.mnncpd.org/registry.html>).
- Has earned a degree, credential, or is pursuing training to reach a higher step in the Minnesota Career Lattice (http://www.mnncpd.org/career_lattice.html). (Points are awarded based on the step achieved.)
- Has completed a professional development plan.

Parent Aware Rating Tool Indicators of Quality Child Care Centers

Designed by child care providers, early learning professionals and parents, Minnesota's voluntary Parent Aware Rating Tool supports our state's children by creating a rating system that identifies, recognizes and celebrates quality in early education.

In order to be rated, a program must:

- Commit to participate (sign a contract).
- Complete orientation.
- Be licensed.
- Submit a program philosophy.
- Submit a health and safety checklist.

Child safety

Programs cannot receive more than 1 star if they have received a maltreatment determination in the past year or have had a negative licensing action, operated under a conditional license or received a fine in the past 6 months.

Quality rating

Points are awarded based on how well programs have incorporated best practices into their programs.

- Programs receive ratings of 1 star, 2 stars, 3 stars or 4 stars.
- Accredited programs completing appropriate documentation receive 4 stars.
- Ratings are awarded based on the number of points programs receive in the four quality indicator categories: family partnerships, tracking learning, teaching materials and strategies, and teacher training and education.

Family partnerships

- Have a formal process to collect and use feedback from parents.
- Communicate regularly with parents, as well as at in-take and for screening.
- Communicate with parents regarding children's transition to kindergarten and between classrooms.
- Use individual plans for children's transition to kindergarten and between classrooms.

Teaching materials and strategies

- Use research-based curriculum (must use an approved research-based curriculum to receive a rating of 3 or 4 stars).
- Promote an effective learning environment and child-adult interactions (involves Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale onsite assessments).
- In preschool classrooms, teacher-child relationships and emotional engagement through instruction and in-classroom organization is assessed by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Programs must score at least in the mid-range (3, 4 or 5) on each category in the CLASS (emotional, instruction and organization) to receive a rating of 4 stars.

Tracking learning

- Use research-based child assessment tool to monitor child progress.
- Provide families with child assessment results.
- Use child assessment information to guide instruction and design goals for individual children.

Teacher training and education

- Education coordinator holds a BA in ECE (the center director may be the education coordinator).
- All lead teachers have recorded and documented their training and education in the Minnesota Center for Professional Development Registry (<http://www.mnncpd.org/registry.html>).
- Lead teachers have earned degrees, credentials or are pursuing training to reach a higher step in the Minnesota Career Lattice (http://www.mnncpd.org/career_lattice.html). (Points are awarded based on the steps lead teachers have achieved.)
- All lead teachers have completed professional development plans.

Form M-016



Appendix D: Summary of content expert feedback

Using ECAC ARRA funds, the Department of Education contracted with the following individuals to review draft standards and indicators and provide feedback:

Nilofer Ahsan, Senior Associate, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Charlotte Hendricks, President, Healthy Childcare Consultants, Inc.

Bob Pianta, Professor of Education, Novartis US Foundation; Dean of Curry School of Education; Director, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, University of Virginia

Catherine Scott-Little, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Teri Talon, Director of Research and Public Policy, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University

Pam Winton, Senior Scientist, Director of Outreach, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina

General feedback

Structure of standards and indicators

- The hierarchy of categories, standards and indicators is reasonable and seems applicable across a variety of types of early childhood programs.
- Few programs would achieve level 5, but it should be attainable for those who wish to dedicate the staffing and resources necessary to attain it.
- There are too few categories for which there is nothing in level 1. Consider setting the bar higher and shifting indicators down a level.
- Regarding a hybrid structure of both blocks and points, it makes sense to have some basic requirements, and then allow programs to reach higher levels in a variety of ways. However, other states have learned that the more complicated the system is, the more likely that there will be errors in the rating process. Err on the side of simple to understand and base on research that is defensible.

Transparency, specificity and rigor

- If Minnesota's QRIS is to have both transparency and the level of rigor and systematic, standardized applicability that would over time produce changes in child outcomes, it will need to use metrics with demonstrable and quantified indices of reliability and validity. Recommended research-based tools include the CLASS and the Program Administration Scale/Business Administration Scale (PAS/BAS).
- For examples of states with QRIS that have designed QRIS with a focus on rigor, look to those who use observational measures such as the PAS/BAS, Early Childhood

Environmental Rating System (ERS), Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and observations associated with the Technical Assistance Center for Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI) model.

- Many of the draft indicators require a submission of a plan or goals in a certain area. A more rigorous measure would require some type of documentation of the actual occurrence of program activities related to the plan or goals.
- Indicators need to be worded as specifically as possible. For example, when the measure is by classroom, such as the CLASS, specify whether the measure is an average across some or all classrooms or a requirement for each classroom.
- Indicators starting with “begins to” do not seem helpful or measurable. A more specific indicator would indicate that the activity can occur on a limited or sporadic basis, but does not have to be fully implemented.
- It is essential that the end product be user-friendly. Design the presentation of the standards and indicators so that they do not intimidate or overwhelm end users, and provide concise definitions so that they can accomplish their goals.
- Each category should stand alone so that a user can clearly determine if they have met all the indicators in a particular category.
- The indicators are generally applicable across the age ranges, but in some places it might be better to apply certain indicators to certain age ranges.
- Consider changing some words to be age-specific (for example, the terms “work” and “instructional assessment” might not be appropriate for infants).
- Strive to develop indicators that are setting-specific, as appropriate.

Gaps in indicators

- Continuity of staff, sometimes measured by low staff turnover, is not addressed in the indicators, yet research indicates that it contributes to program quality and improved outcomes for children. That said, staff turnover is difficult to measure accurately. An alternate indicator could address staffing patterns and policies that encourage the practice of looping to allow a teacher to stay with the same group of children as they grow and develop over several years.

Health, safety and wellbeing category

- The term “wellbeing” is not specific to this category. In other words, standards in other categories will also contribute to children’s wellbeing. The term “wellness” could be used instead; however, it may be too ambiguous for some users.
- The indicators are missing several key elements, including 1) sanitation and disease prevention, 2) oral health, 3) emergency preparedness, 4) indoor and outdoor safety.
- None of the draft indicators addresses safety in this category, so consider dropping the word “safety” from the category title.
- Developmental screening should be included at one of the beginning levels.

- Topics including nutrition and fitness are addressed but need more specific guidance based on national recommendations such as National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE) guidelines.
- Some indicators are too specific in this category. For example, limitations on media use should be addressed in a program's daily schedule, but is not appropriate as a separate QRIS indicator.
- Indicators related to disability and special needs are not specific to this category and should not be included here. Recommend creating a stand-alone category or address across all categories.
- Consider adding an indicator to this category that would require programs to have policies and practices in place to ensure children are safe from child abuse and neglect, such as mandated reporter training.

Family partnerships category

- Suggest changing this category title to "Family and Community Partnerships" to align with the Minnesota Core Competencies and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and elevate the importance of community partnerships.
- There are no professional development requirements for parent education, yet providing parent education is a draft indicator. Consider adding a training requirement.
- Consider adding a standard regarding the teacher/caregiver's role in reaching out and building relationships with a child's parents/family.
- Consider changing the definition of this category from an emphasis on "respectful early childhood education delivery" to "engage families as partners in their child's education."
- Consider adding a new category or building onto the family partnership category to capture standards related to community partnerships. Add indicators related to collaborating with community programs and services, responsive to community events, being active in community-building activities, and building community among families participating in the early learning setting.
- Indicator on "system for sharing daily events" should be revised to be more specific (i.e., "keep a daily log").
- Consider adding an indicator to support successful transition from the home into the early childhood program. The indicator on an orientation meeting with parents may be part of transition activities.
- Consider adding an indicator about setting joint goals with the family regarding their child's progress.
- Consider the following options for further integrating Strengthening Families protective factors into the QRIS:
 - Crosswalk items in the Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment Tool to existing standards and indicators.

- Require completion of the Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment Tool.
- Use selected measures from the Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment Tool as QRIS indicators.
- Create an infrastructure around the QRIS to help programs integrate Strengthening Families concepts into their quality improvement efforts.
- Create incentives for participating in Strengthening Families training.

Assessment of child progress category

- This category should link with the Teaching and Relationships category where appropriate, but should not be combined with it.
- Consider adding an indicator related to sharing assessment information during the special needs referral process, as well as with the ISFP/IEP team.
- Carefully consider indicators that require the use of child assessment tools in family child care homes, since most tools were not designed for this setting. Similarly, there are a limited number of assessment tools available for infants and toddlers, so the QRIS should recognize that there is little choice for programs in this area.
- Consider making the indicators more quantifiable/documentable. For example, make distinctions between the levels by the number of children for whom assessment results are used in individual planning (some, most, all), by the frequency with which assessment results are used to guide planning (periodically, monthly, weekly, daily), or level at which the results are used (whole group activities, small groups or individualized plans for individual children).
- Specify how much training is required for using an assessment tool, and whether or not ongoing training on it is required.
- Consider modifying or adding an indicator to measure whether programs are using assessment tools with a certain level of fidelity.
- Formal family involvement tools are not likely available with most assessment tools, so consider dropping the indicator that references this. If the indicator is retained, consider using the phrase “parent input” rather than “family involvement.”
- The Ages & Stages Questionnaire might be a better tool for getting information from families, but it is a screening, not a child assessment tool.
- Consider adding an indicator about engaging families in the assessment results, including activities at home to follow up.

Teaching and relationships category

- The word “relationships” is not exclusive to this category. Consider adding indicators related to relationships with parents, if the category name remains as is.
- Recommend deleting the draft indicator that states “provides at least 12 hours per week of instructional time” because of measurement challenges.

- Recommend modifying the standard related to teachers being prepared to help children “catch up” and focus instead on teachers/caregivers being able to intentionally support all children’s learning in the areas described in the standards. It is better to focus on teachers being knowledgeable about the scope and sequence of children’s learning in these areas, and able to intentionally teach children these skills rather than focusing on children’s remediation.
- If using the phrase “research-based curriculum” in an indicator, consider ways to make it more meaningful by requiring evidence from evaluations with suitable controls, or alternatively, defining or operationalizing the term in ways that allow consumers/users to select appropriate resources.
- Recommend identifying curriculum for which there is evidence. There have been good studies on literacy and math curricula. For locally developed curricula, allow programs to evaluate their effectiveness with their own assessments.
- To ensure rigor with respect to use of curriculum, consider how to measure fidelity of implementation. For example, a fidelity checklist could be developed for each curriculum that could then be used by outside observers.
- Recommendations on use of CLASS in a QRIS:
 - Can be used in family child care settings, but do not use pre-kindergarten version in a family child care setting with mostly infants.
 - Research shows impact on child outcomes when programs score between a 2.5 and 3 on the Instructional Support domain, and higher than 4 for the other two domains.

Professional development

- There is good research-based support for inclusion of this category in a QRIS, though recent research on the quality of higher education is calling the findings of earlier research into question.
- The draft shows professional development-related indicators scattered across multiple categories. Recommend grouping all of these indicators in the Professional Development category to more clearly convey all training requirements.
- Consider providing more specificity regarding the types of ongoing professional development required of program directors, education coordinators, and staff/caregivers to ensure they have current knowledge.
- Indicators related to ongoing professional development should provide more specificity related to the amount of training, type of training, and timeframe within which it must be completed.
- If Minnesota has a cross-sector professional development system plan, consider using as a guide for assessing the appropriateness of the QRIS indicators in this category.

- Linkages between professional development initiatives for each type of early childhood program should be aligned with QRIS indicators in order to leverage resources and provide consistent messages to programs.
- Suggest using the broader, more inclusive term of “professional development” rather than “training” whenever possible.
- Recommend that professional development required in the QRIS meet quality standards through use of a state approval or other quality assurance process. Alternatively, training shown to be effective in controlled evaluations could be required or included.
- Consider incorporating a tiered approach to professional development whereby assessment, progress monitoring and instruction are strongly linked.
- Accruing seat time in training will not produce the program quality needed to impact child outcomes. Including measures of observed quality adds needed rigor to a QRIS.
- There should be indicators at level 5 for the standard on ongoing professional development.

Program planning and management category

- Recommend changing the category name to Program Administration so that it is more applicable across program types.
- Recommend changing the title “director” to “program administrator” and using “provider” for family child care owner.
- Recommend adding more requirements on professional development for program administrators.
- Suggest requiring that program administrators have specialized preparation in program administration or business administration.
- Suggest requiring that programs have liability insurance and written policies and procedures in place to minimize risk and ensure consistent implementation.
- Recommend adding as an indicator that program “attracts and retains qualified staff by implementing effective human resource development practices.”
- Recommend adding an indicator that requires ongoing program evaluation.
- Suggest adding an indicator related to doing a program self-assessment using the Program Administration Scale/Business Administration Scale (PAS/BAS).
- Suggest adding an indicator on having an annual operating budget, cash-flow projections, and independent review of accounting practices.
- Recommend including indicators on pay for performance and performance appraisals.

Appendix E

Public Input Process Consultant Report

Results:
Statewide Stakeholder Consultation
on
Draft Early Childhood
Standards and Indicators

Prepared for
Minnesota Department of Education and the
Minnesota Department of Human Services

February 2011

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Introduction

On behalf of the Minnesota Department of Education and the Department of Human Services, our consulting team conducted a comprehensive stakeholder consultation around the draft early childhood common program standards and indicators to inform a statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System framework. The work was funded by the Early Childhood Advisory Council as part of their work on program standards. The departments sought robust input from stakeholders throughout the state, and are using that to help shape their final draft recommendations to the Legislature in spring 2011.

Process and Participation Summary

The stakeholder consultation process design began with a stakeholder identification and analysis workshop in October 2010, from which our team and the departments jointly developed a detailed Stakeholder Consultation Plan. That plan listed all key stakeholders to be included in this consultation, and for each listed their “stake,” purpose of engagement, any barriers to their engagement and how to overcome those barriers, tools and techniques, contacts, responsibility, and schedule/status.

Stakeholders for this specific statewide consultation effort included the full range of organizations – direct service providers from all types of programs, advocates, legislators, and membership organizations, and covered the entire state. Consultation techniques were tailored to stakeholders and included workshops, public sessions, an online or paper survey, small-group sessions, and formal letters from organizations.

Input opportunities in November and early December 2011 were as follows:

- Public sessions and workshops in Alexandria, Shakopee, Golden Valley, Grand Rapids, Mankato, Maplewood, and Roseville
- Specialized workshops and small-group sessions in Minneapolis and St. Paul, focused on those serving or representing children, families, and providers of color and new immigrants, as well as parents
- An online survey that was open from November 17 to December 8



Both the in-person sessions and the online survey used as the primary resource a handout that provided an introduction, all draft standards and indicators, and answers to frequently asked questions (see Appendix, page 13). State staff members also attended the in-person sessions to show their respect and appreciation for stakeholder input but did not participate in any way, neither contributing content nor answering questions – we instead relied on the detailed FAQs to ensure consistent messages statewide.

To offer equitable opportunities for all stakeholders who wished to contribute, the in-person sessions and the online survey provided the same complete information about the draft standards and five levels of indicators and posed the following questions:

- How could the indicators across levels 1-5 better align and progress logically up to the standards?
- If any of these indicators might be barriers to provider participation, how would you change them to reduce those barriers?
- Fundamentally, these standards and indicators are about kindergarten preparedness. How could the standards (below) be improved or changed to better accomplish that?

As shown in the photos, at in-person sessions participants were divided into tables and recorded their table's narrative responses to the key questions; online participants did the same in response to these open-ended questions. Session participants were instructed to document all input rather than trying to reach consensus. A spokesperson from each table reported out to the group sample responses to the third question. Our analysis of the input showed that while there was sometimes consensus on an issue that was important to table members, participants had no trouble expressing the full range of positions and offering numerous and varied ideas on all of the topics.



Both the in-person sessions and online survey also asked people to volunteer the following demographic information:

Which most closely represents your primary perspective in giving input?

- Caregiver or teacher
- Parent or guardian
- Advocate or similar
- Program director/owner/administrator
- Child care resource and referral
- Higher education
- Other (please specify)

Which most closely represents your work setting or focus area?

- Licensed family child care
- Child care center
- Head Start
- School district pre-K
- Other (please specify)

Years in early childhood education

Zip code
Gender
Decade in which you were born
Race/ethnicity
Home language



Participation and Input

Thanks to numerous organizations throughout the state that helped organize and promoted both the in-person sessions and the survey link, we had excellent stakeholder participation in the state's consultation on the early childhood draft common program standards and indicators. Over 700 people participated through in-person sessions or via an online survey between 17 November and 9 December 2010; about 180 of these were in person and the rest contributed via the online survey. While this stakeholder consultation process was *not designed to yield a stratified random sample*, the flexible design and successful outreach to underrepresented stakeholders resulted in confidence in the demographic distribution as well as the breadth and quality of the input to help shape the state's final recommendations on standards and indicators within the QRIS.



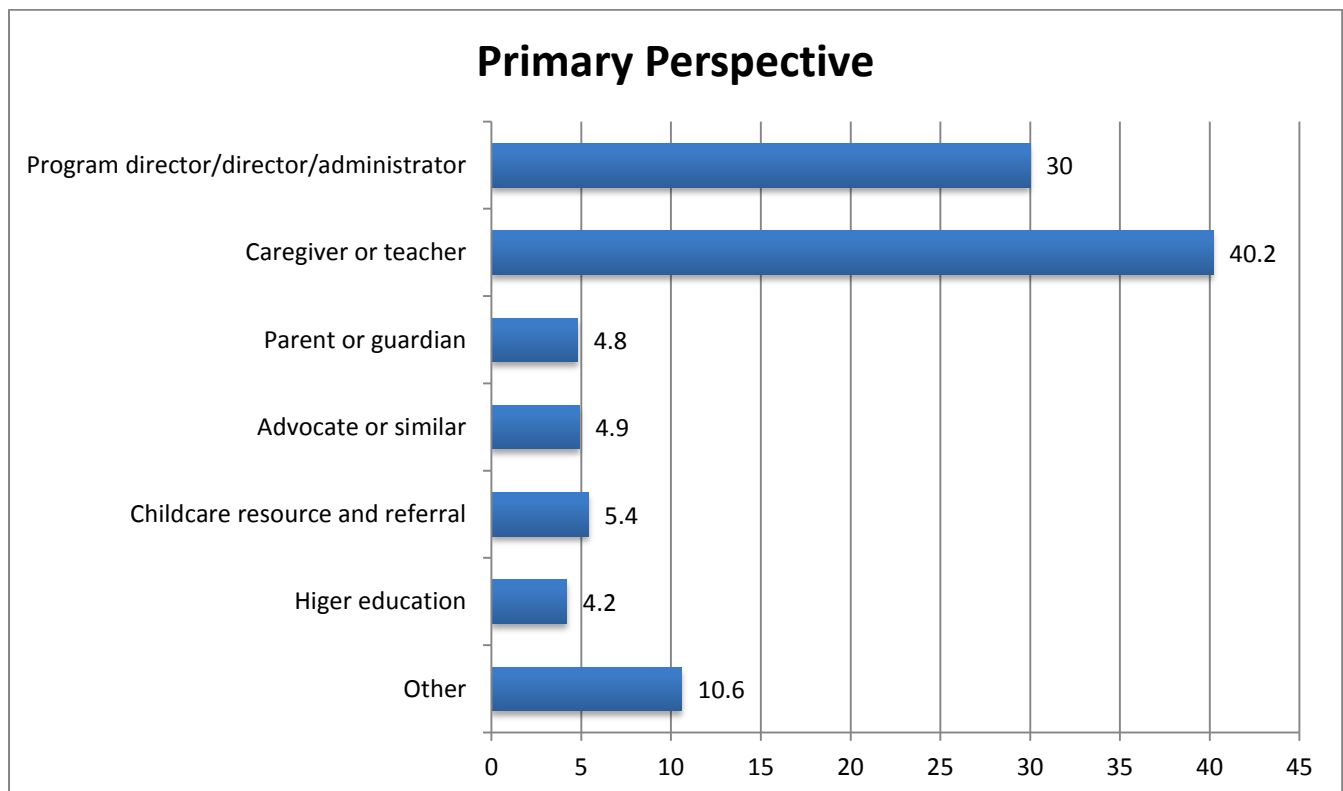
This section includes the demographic characteristics of the 683 participants who answered one or more of the demographic questions either in person or online. Following that is a discussion of the narrative input offered by participants and how the state used that to revise the draft common program standards and indicators.

Demographic Characteristics

This section characterizes the demographics of nearly all of the participants in the statewide stakeholder consultation. Of the 700+ participants, 683 provided responses to one or more of the demographic questions. It is important to note that this stakeholder consultation was *not* intended as a stratified random sample, so any comparisons to statewide data in the following narrative are simply reflections rather than any form of analysis.

Primary Perspective

As shown on the graph below, the majority of participants in the input process were caregivers/teachers, followed by program directors/owners/administrators. While we differentiated between those groups, they are in fact very similar, and when combined represent 70% of participants. This distribution aligns with the stakeholders identified through our initial stakeholder identification and analysis, and the results reflect our outreach efforts. Because comprehensive input from parents on these issues has been gathered by the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation and the Department of Human Services over the last several years, this stakeholder consultation did not target parents, as reflected in the data below.

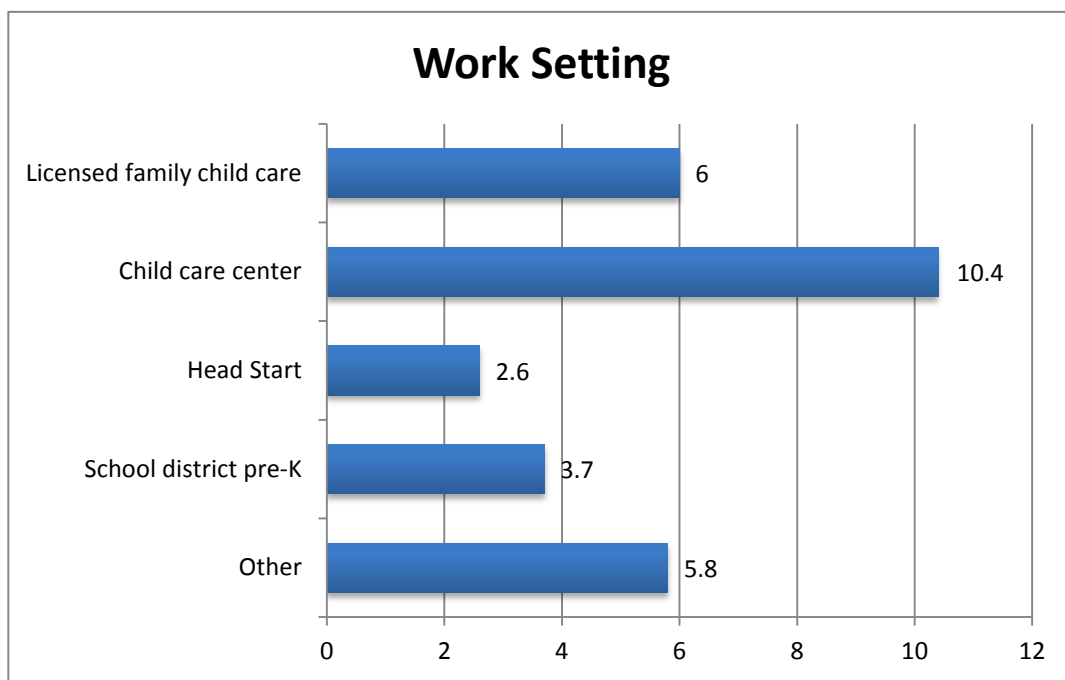


Gender

Males represented only 4% of the participants in this consultation, generally reflecting their much lower numbers among these stakeholder groups.

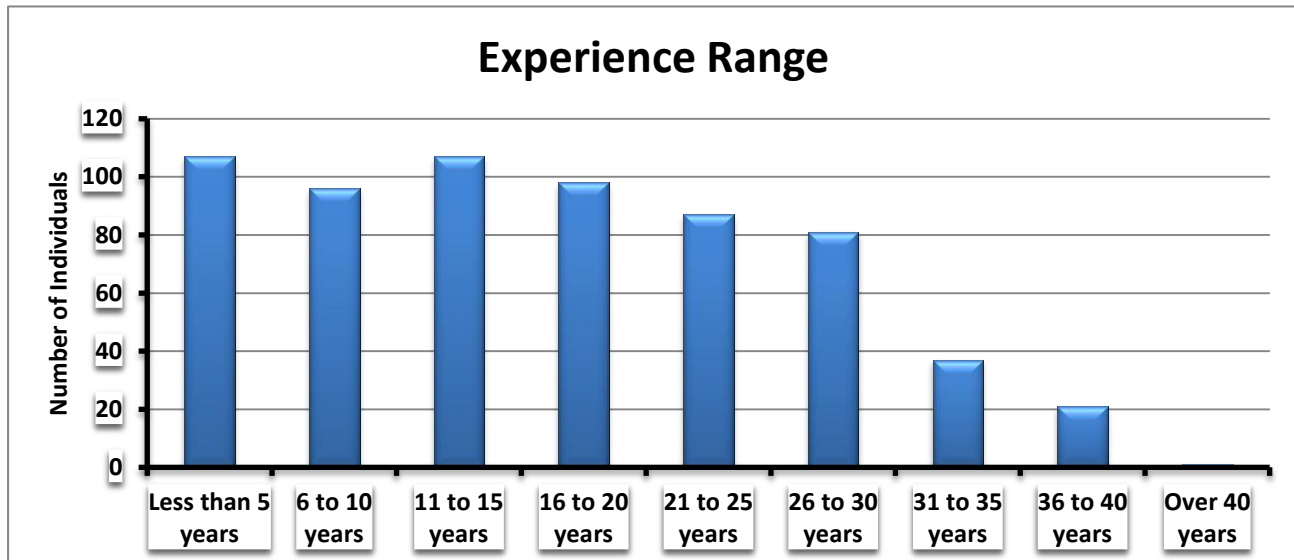
Work Setting / Focus

Participants working in direct service organizations, child care centers, or family child care homes were the largest group of participants in the stakeholder consultation process. Those involved with Head Start had the lowest participation levels. People listing their work or focus area as “other” included kindergarten teachers, ECFE teachers, social workers, and educators in higher education, among others.



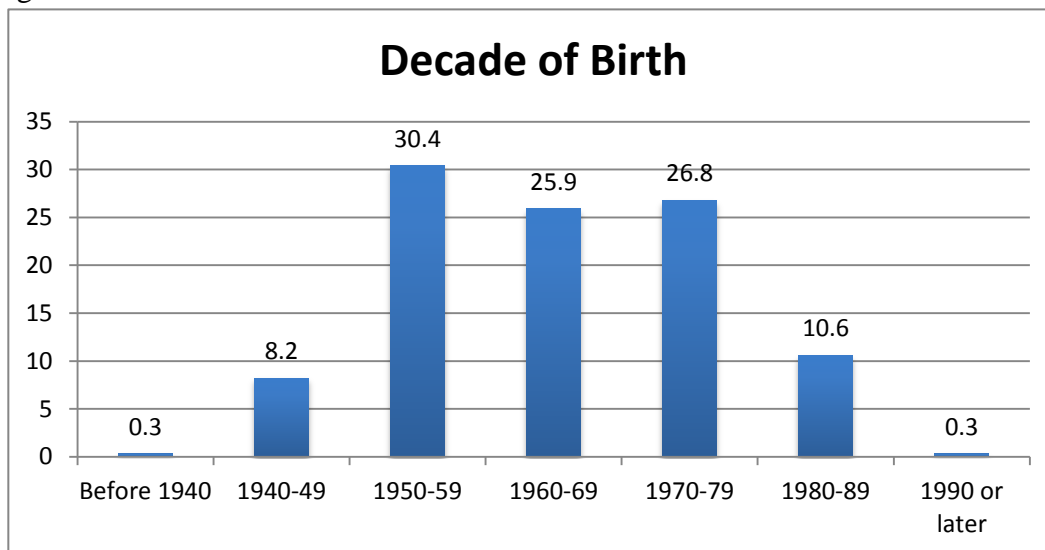
Years in Early Childhood Care or Education

More than 600 of the in-person and online participants answered this demographic question. Although responses varied from less than 1 year to more than 40 years, the mean (or average) years of experience was 17 years. The mode, or number that appears most frequently, is 30 years. Simply put, most of those participating in the input process are seasoned childhood care/education professionals and providers.



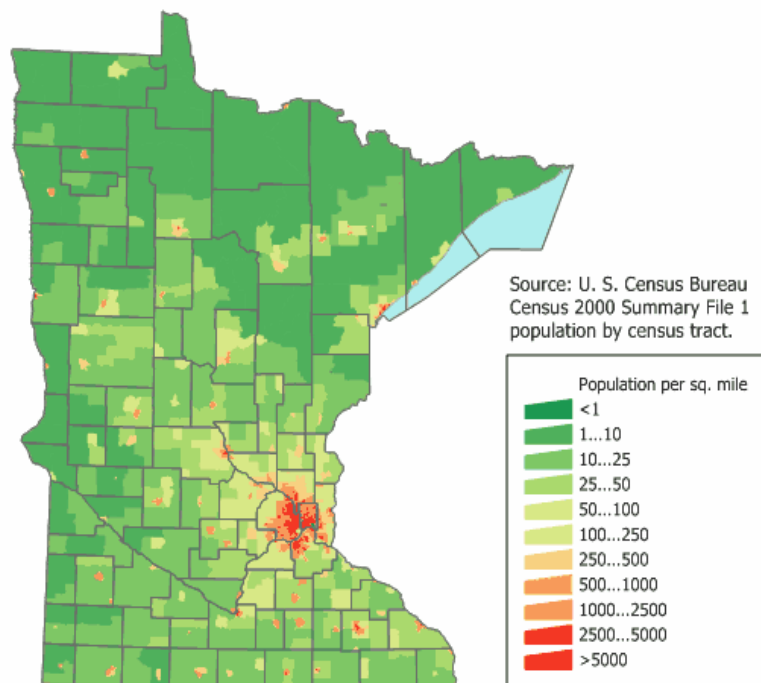
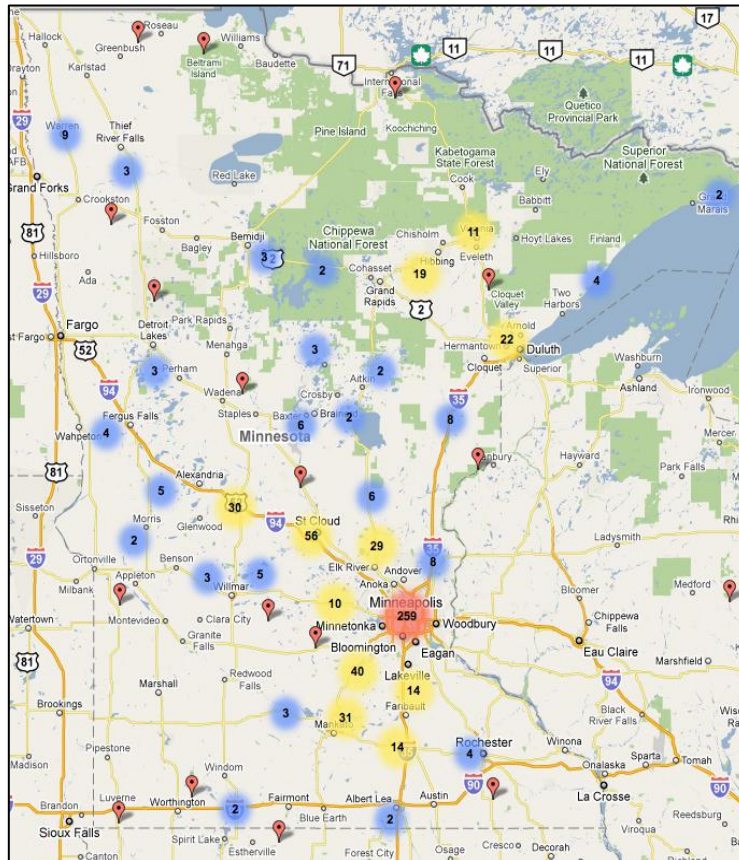
Age

As might be expected, the highest percentage of participants were between 51 and 60, followed by those ages 31 to 50.



Location

Input was gathered from across the state, with the greatest participation from stakeholders in the Twin Cities area. As shown on the two maps, the distribution of participants aligns reasonably well with statewide population distributions.



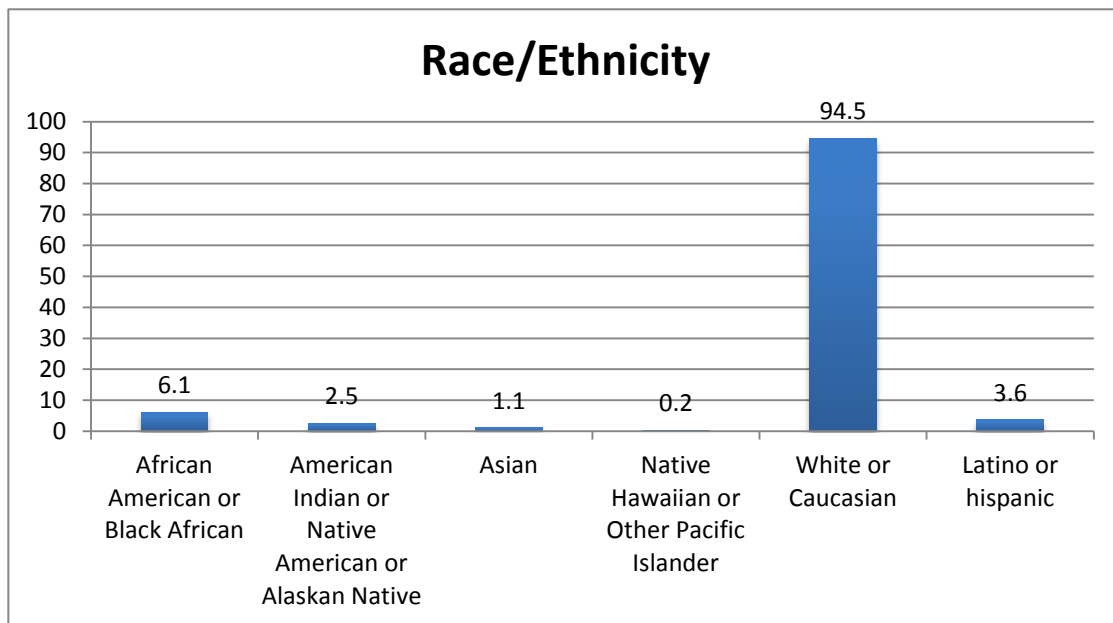
Race/Ethnicity

In collaboration with partners, our consulting team did reach out specifically and successfully to providers of and advocates for children in poverty and of color; nearly all of these participants were in the Twin Cities metro area.

Overall, however, participants identifying themselves as White / Caucasian represented more than 94% of statewide participants.

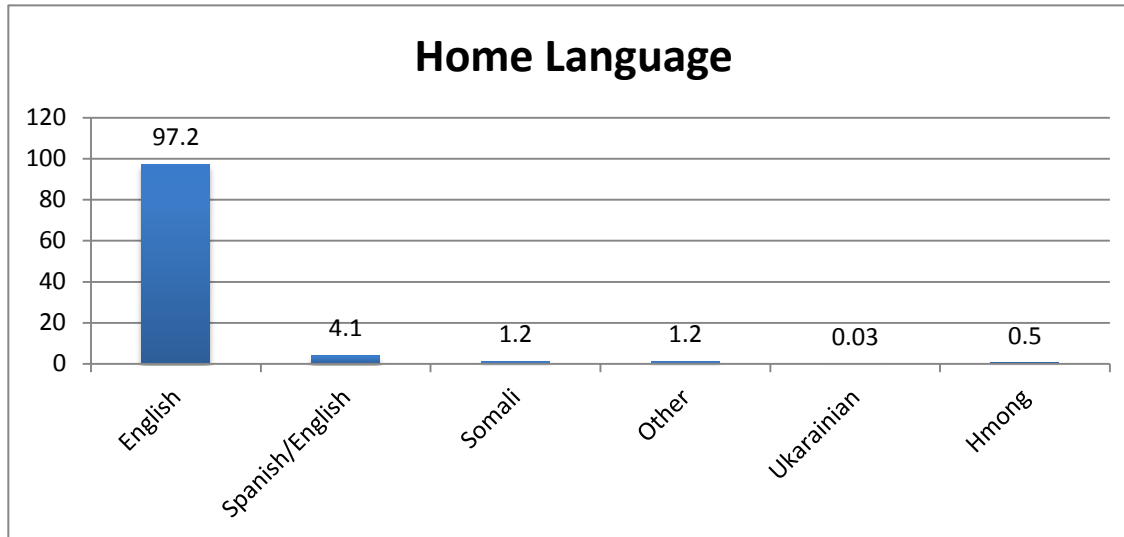
Those selecting African American or Black African comprised slightly more than 6%, with self-identified Hispanic or Latino participants representing slightly more than 3.5%.

While this somewhat under-represents the statewide population of adults of color and *may* be similar to the race/ethnicity of practitioners in the state, the demographics of actual practitioners as well as the general adult population are out of sync with growing statewide population of *children*, an increasing percentage of whom are of color.



Home Language

English is the dominant home language of input process participants, with Spanish or Spanish / English a distant second.



Narrative Input

The extensive narrative input from the in-person sessions and online survey was entered or downloaded into Excel worksheets and thoroughly reviewed and analyzed in several ways. The complete set of raw and analyzed data was provided to state staff.

Both in-person sessions and online surveys gathered *open-ended responses* to three questions:

- Question 1: How could the indicators across levels 1-5 better align and progress logically up to the standards?
- Question 2: If any of these indicators might be barriers to provider participation, how would you change them to reduce those barriers?
- Question 3: Fundamentally, these standards and indicators are about kindergarten preparedness. How could the standards (below) be improved or changed to better accomplish that?

The online survey also offered space for completely open responses above and beyond those three questions.

The consulting team sorted each input item by which question elicited the response, and coded each by the relevant category of standard: Physical Health and Wellbeing, Family Partnerships, Teaching and Relationships, Assessment of Child Progress, and Professional Development. We also created new categories for responses related to system design, implementation, and general comments.



The input was then further coded and sorted as follows:

- 1=Key issues with potential system or policy implications
- 2=Technical and content issues
- 3=Out of scope, unrelated (e.g., suggestions for the Parent Aware program, requests to change state laws, “no comment,” etc.)
- 4=Positives, kudos, compliments

The coded technical and content issues (2s) were further organized and provided to the agencies. A dedicated team of state staff members reviewed them in detail and used that input to inform revisions to the draft standards and indicators.

Several summaries of key system and policy issues (1s) raised by stakeholders were prepared. Our consulting team also conducted workshops with state staff to explore these relative to the standards and indicators, system design, and structure. Implementation issues were addressed as they related to content and structure, and other items were tracked for future attention as the process moves forward with Legislative direction.

The remainder of this section summarizes our consulting team’s qualitative analysis of the major technical/content, system, and policy issues raised by stakeholders.

Key Issues

1. **Support for standards:** In spite of one of the three key questions posed to stakeholders asking how to improve the *standards* to better prepare children for kindergarten, stakeholders overwhelmingly supported the standards and turned their attention instead to proposed changes to the indicators.
2. **Number and complexity of indicators:** Many participants were concerned that there were too many indicators and some were overly complex or layered, making the system potentially unwieldy.
 - Embedding ERS and CLASS brings richness and rigor to the system but combined with the other indicators increases the number and complexity and becomes confusing. In addition, because many indicators on social/emotional development, creativity, physical and outdoor activities, and those specific to infants and toddlers were included *within* the ERS and CLASS systems, they were not obvious to most participants.
 - Participants also expressed concern that the number of indicators would make it difficult to focus on those that make the most difference for children.
 - Some participants were concerned that the system wasn't yet sufficiently flexible to accommodate programs that were organized under different systems such as Montessori or School Readiness.
3. **Cultural proficiency:** Neither the general adult population nor individuals working in early childhood programs reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic demographics of today's young children. That said, stakeholders representing or serving children of color and in poverty provided important insights into how QRIS indicators can best support high quality early childhood services for children of color and in poverty.
 - Participants serving children of color or in poverty, as well as some other participants, noted that the draft indicators for this topic focused on better communications but did not sufficiently support programs to reach out to and respectfully serve families for whom English is not their first language nor families of all kinds that are "different" from particular providers.
 - It is important to note, however, that most of that frustration was about needing support for this outreach, not about the importance of cultural proficiency.
 - Many stakeholders insisted that cultural proficiency expectations should be baseline – beginning at level one or even included in licensing requirements rather than starting at level two.
4. **Process transparency and accessibility:** Stakeholders provided considerable input on how to make the process clearer and easier to understand and improve quality. Understanding and analyzing the input was complicated because the state's draft process is based on a block scoring structure while the four-year Parent Aware pilot (with which large numbers of our participants were quite familiar) used a point structure.
 - Many stakeholders proposed alternative pathways up through the levels under each category, also cautioning that such an



approach needed to reduce the number of indicators while it accounted for existing capacity or other resources.

- Some stakeholders had concerns about the extent to which embedded systems like ERS and CLASS, as well as the QRIS indicators, were sufficiently flexible to accommodate the wide variety of programs, providers, and families throughout the state without there being confusing exceptions.
- Stakeholders familiar with ERS and CLASS noted that each uses a different internal scoring or measurement system, and both were different from the proposed block approach, raising concerns about people's understanding and administration. They also noted that the CLASS was developed for use in classrooms with 3-4 year olds, not for classrooms with infants/toddlers or in family child care settings.

- 5. Access to training and support:** Stakeholders in many rural areas and communities in poverty stated clear support for quality programs and better outcomes for children, but were very concerned that those who need this the most are least able to access or afford the requisite training, education programs, health consultants, special needs or mental health resources, dieticians, etc.
- 6. Links between early childhood and K-12:** Participants recognized that strong connections between K-12 and early childhood education programs benefit children, families, and both school and early childhood program staff. Many stakeholders didn't see these connections as being fully articulated in the standards and indicators, and some noted that there was no apparent commitment on the part of the local school districts to respect their work and actively support or sustain such linkages.

7. Reciprocity and “approved” resources:

While the consultation process was not focused on implementation, there were many questions and concerns from stakeholders about how this new process will align with state licensing, NAEYC accreditation, school district and School Readiness Program parameters, Head Start requirements, Parent Aware indicators, and the Child Care and Adult Food Program. There was further confusion about the references to “approved” programs, courses, consultants, etc., which were not developed for consideration during the public input process.



- 8. Management:** A number of stakeholders noted that program/business management was a critical component of program success but were concerned that it was listed as a standard under professional development without associated indicators; they supported these being developed rather than the standard being dropped.

Appendix

Attached is the handout with the draft standards and indicators that formed the centerpiece of this statewide consultation process.

It was used in this form for the in-person sessions, and participants responded to the following three questions:

- Question 1: How could the indicators across levels 1-5 better align and progress logically up to the standards?
- Question 2: If any of these indicators might be barriers to provider participation, how would you change them to reduce those barriers?
- Question 3: Fundamentally, these standards and indicators are about kindergarten preparedness. How could the standards (below) be improved or changed to better accomplish that?

For the online survey, the sections were divided by standard for ease of response, with respondents answering the same three questions as in the in-person sessions.

Common Program Standards and Quality Indicators for Early Childhood Programs

November 2010

Minnesota's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment data show that Minnesota has significant challenges in ensuring all children are fully prepared for kindergarten, especially in the developmental areas of mathematical thinking, language, and literacy. Children in poverty and in families where English is not the primary language spoken are at highest risk of entering kindergarten already behind other children, and may spend their entire school experience trying to catch up...sometimes without success. However, decades of research shows that children who attend high quality early childhood programs are much better prepared to enter school and be successful, graduate on time, and go on to college and careers.

For a number of years Minnesota has been working on a quality rating and improvement system in order to provide parents/guardians with more information regarding quality of programs and so that children across the state can benefit from high quality early care and learning programs. The 2009 Legislature took up this effort and directed the Minnesota Department of Education and Department of Human Services to develop

recommendations for common program standards and indicators for a statewide voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).

Since then, the departments have been developing standards and indicators based on best practice, research, the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation's Parent Aware QRIS pilot and evaluation, and review by a panel of national experts. This voluntary QRIS applies to family child care, child care centers, and Head Start programs that are licensed and in good standing, and school-based pre-K programs. (Note: A brief explanation of the Environment Rating Scale and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS] used in the draft standards and indicators is included in the Frequently Asked Questions.)

We also welcome input via an online survey at the following address: www.surveymonkey.com/s/QRISConsultation. An electronic version of this handout is available at: www.bit.ly/98cUz3. For information about in-person sessions around the state or questions about the process please email Eileen.Nelson@state.mn.us or Deb.Swenson-Klatt@state.mn.us.

Physical Health and Wellbeing				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides families with contact information for resources for available vision, hearing, dental, and development screenings Has received at least one onsite Environment Rating Scale consultation unless the program has scored a 3 overall on the Environment Rating Scale Family child care providers have completed approved training on health and safety including child abuse, maltreatment, prevention, and reporting (this is already a licensing requirement for child care center employees) 	<p>All indicators under level 1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed an Environment Rating Scale awareness course unless the program scored a 3 overall on the Environment Rating Scale For programs scoring below a 3 in any one of the Environment Rating Scale subscales, an improvement plan has been submitted for approval 	<p>All indicators under level 2, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed approved training on child nutrition or the program participates in the Minnesota Child and Adult Food Program Earns observed score of 3.5 or higher on the Environment Rating Scale 	<p>All indicators under level 3, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns observed score of 4 or higher on Environment Rating Scale 	<p>All indicators under level 4, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earns observed score of 4.5 or higher on ERS Full-day programs only: Has an annual consultation with a qualified nutritionist or registered dietitian to develop a written nutrition plan Family child care only: Has an annual consultation with a qualified health consultant to update health policies and procedures, identify health and safety issues, and provide a written report

Family Partnerships

a. Communicates with families on a regular basis; b. Supports children's transitions; c. Links families to parent education and comprehensive services

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refers families to a parent education program such as the Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program Refers families to early childhood health and development screening Family child care programs only: Keeps a daily log on topics such as sleeping, feeding, and behavior guidance and shares with parents (this is already a licensing requirement for child care center employees) 	<p>All indicators under level 1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collects and reviews feedback from families on program and services Communicates critical program information with families in the family's primary language Offers orientation meetings for new families that include a discussion about their preferences, including those related to cultural norms and traditions Creates plans for transition between classrooms and for family child care between developmental milestones Refers families to appropriate health care and social services and to "Help Me Grow" for mental health and special education services 	<p>All indicators under level 2, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops and implements action plan to address family feedback on program and services Works with families to create plans for kindergarten transition 	<p>All indicators under level 3, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a family advisory committee to gather input at least annually Makes family resource and education materials available 	<p>All indicators under level 4, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps families access frequently requested family support services such as child care subsidy, medical assistance, and cash assistance, as needed Provides group parent-education sessions that focus on child development

Teaching and Relationships

a. Promotes and supports the learning and development of all children, including children who are linguistically and culturally diverse, and children with disabilities; b. Demonstrates effectiveness through intentional interactions with children; c. Provides individualized instruction that promotes development and helps close the learning gap so that children perform at age level or higher

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 8 hours of approved, basic child development training, 2 hours of which is on observing children 	<p>All indicators under level 1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses lesson plans and a daily schedule All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 8 hours of approved training on the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a CLASS awareness course or the equivalent For programs scoring below a 2 in any one of the CLASS domains, has submitted an improvement plan for approval 	<p>All indicators under level 2, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a curriculum that is aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress and has completed approved training on implementing curriculum All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 4 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on children's developmental disabilities, special health care needs, and behavioral challenges All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 4 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on supporting social-emotional, language, literacy, mathematical thinking, and physical development in young children Earns observed scores on CLASS: Emotional Support (ES)=4, Instructional Support (IS)=2.5, Classroom Organization (CO)=3.5 If a child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Interagency Family Services Plan (IFSP), has requested a copy to inform instruction 	<p>All indicators under level 3, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 8 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on children's developmental disabilities, special health care needs, and behavioral challenges All caregivers/lead teachers have completed a total of at least 8 hours of approved training or equivalent coaching on supporting social-emotional, language, literacy, mathematical thinking, and physical development in young children Earns observed scores on CLASS: ES=5, IS=3, CO=4.5 	<p>All indicators under level 4, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connects with a kindergarten teacher or school district staff to learn about what is expected of children and the instruction offered in kindergarten, and works toward curriculum alignment Earns observed scores on CLASS: ES=6, IS=3.5, CO=5.5

Assessment of Child Progress

a. Assesses children by observing and tracking their developmental progress using a research-based assessment tool, and uses those results to individualize instruction; b. Includes families in the assessment process

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All caregivers/lead teachers have completed training on observation • Observes children regularly and records information at least monthly 	<p>All indicators under level 1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares observation summaries with families • Tracks learning using a tool aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress 	<p>All indicators under level 2, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All caregivers/lead teachers have completed training on using an approved assessment tool • Conducts assessment using approved tool at least twice per year on 1/3 of all children in at least the following domains: language and literacy, mathematical thinking, social-emotional development, and physical development • Asks families to share information about child's progress at home • Shares assessment results with families during meetings or family conferences 	<p>All indicators under level 3, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares assessment results twice per year with families and sets joint goals for children's progress • For a child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Interagency Family Services Plan (IFSP), shares assessment results with team with family's permission. For a child with a special need who is receiving specialty services (i.e., physical or occupational therapist) shares assessment results with service providers with family's permission. • Conducts assessment using an approved tool for all children twice a year in at least the following domains: language and literacy, mathematical thinking, social-emotional development, and physical development 	<p>All indicators under level 4, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares assessment results three times a year with families and sets joint goals for children's progress • Conducts assessment using an approved assessment tool for all children three times a year in at least the following domains: language and literacy, mathematical thinking, social-emotional development, and physical development

Professional Development

- a. Caregivers/lead teachers, program directors/administrators, education coordinators: Have formal education degrees or credentials in early childhood education or a related field and are engaged in ongoing professional development to ensure current knowledge and skills;
b. Program directors/administrators have specialized preparation in program administration or business management

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have submitted verified training and professional development credentials 	<p>All indicators under level 1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have professional development plans 	<p>All indicators under level 2, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed at least <i>one</i> of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 early childhood-related, approved semester credits Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition All caregivers/lead teachers have completed training in working with families from different cultures and socio-economic levels 	<p>All indicators under level 3, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have completed at least <i>one</i> of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 early childhood-related, approved semester credits 2 early childhood-related, approved semester credits and a Diploma from the Association of Montessori International, or preprimary credential, or primary diploma, or provisional certificate from the American Montessori Society Certificate in Child Development or Early Childhood Education from a community or technical college Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition and at least 60 hours of approved coaching/mentoring All caregivers/lead teachers are making progress on their professional development plans For child care centers, school-based preschool programs, and Head Start programs: Education coordinator, director, or lead administrator has a baccalaureate degree with at least 24 early childhood-related, approved semester credits 	<p>All indicators under level 4, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All caregivers/lead teachers have a baccalaureate degree with at least 24 early childhood-related, approved semester credits or higher All caregivers/lead teachers are making progress on their professional development plans For child care centers, director has a director's credential

Minnesota Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Common Program Standards and Indicators Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Why is this being done now?** For a number of years Minnesota has been working on a quality rating and improvement system so that children across the state can benefit from high quality early care and learning programs and be better prepared for kindergarten. The 2009 state Legislature took up this effort and directed the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Department of Human Services (DHS) to develop recommendations for common program standards and indicators for a statewide voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).
- 2. How will QRIS specifically benefit at-risk children?** Minnesota's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment data show that Minnesota has significant challenges in ensuring all children are fully prepared for kindergarten, especially in the developmental areas of mathematical thinking, language, and literacy. Children in poverty and in families where English is not the primary language spoken are at highest risk of entering kindergarten already behind other children, and may spend their entire school experience trying to catch up...sometimes without success. However, decades of research shows that children who attend high quality early childhood programs are much better prepared to enter school and be successful, graduate on time, and go on to college and careers.
- 3. How is the implementation going to work?** The next step is to await action in the 2011 Minnesota Legislature, which will also shape the implementation timeline. If no action is taken, MDE and DHS will continue training and preparing providers for implementation at some unspecified time in the future; if an implementation date is established and funds allocated, the departments will develop detailed implementation plans. Launching a statewide QRIS includes planning for awarding and monitoring ratings, provider improvement supports and incentives, professional development, parent outreach, information and incentives, and system evaluation and funding. This is a work in progress and will require supporting all affected programs as the system progresses.
- 4. How will this affect me? Is this required?** As in the current Parent Aware pilot and in all planning for a future QRIS, participation is voluntary. The framework of common program standards and indicators is designed to include licensed family child care homes, child care centers, and Head Start programs that are licensed and in good standing, and school-based pre-K programs. There are some minor differences in how the standards apply to the different programs; those are noted in the indicators.
- 5. Who determines what "level" a program is? Who gets those results?** There are several important steps in preparing for the program rating process: a) Ensure clarity about the standards and indicators, and the evidence and documentation needed for meeting the indicators; b) train and develop a set of skilled staff to handle the observations and review the documentation; specially trained and reliable observers will conduct and score the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tools as part of the gathering of program information; c) review and determine a level. Also in this process are opportunities for programs to access support to help understand the process and requirements. Details for implementing a statewide QRIS are not yet developed but the assumption is that to support parent choice, levels will be posted on a QRIS website (as they are in Parent Aware).

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6. **What happens to programs that are already accredited by other organizations?** The extent to which credit may be given for meeting other accreditation requirements or program standards will be determined after the standards and indicators have been finalized in order to ensure alignment.
7. **Will there be any support to help programs, providers, and staff improve?** The Department of Education and Department of Human Services are committed to professional development, including making specific types of training available to programs that enroll in the QRIS. The amount and type of targeted professional development will be dependent on funding, as will the implementation of plans for quality improvement supports.
8. **How does this QRIS relate to the Parent Aware QRIS standards and indicators?** Per Legislative direction, the state Department of Education and Department of Human Services drafted the common program standards and indicators using the Parent Aware pilot as the foundation. Parent Aware is a pilot, and its funding ends June 2011. On 11 November 2010, the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) released the year-three evaluation of Parent Aware. The departments will review those results along with the feedback they receive from these in-person and online stakeholder consultations as they finalize their recommendations to the Legislature.
9. **Why do the proposed indicators use two observation tools, the ERS and the CLASS?** These observation tools linked to positive child outcomes were included as indicators to support the QRIS goal of improving the school readiness of children. These two observation tools capture quality by examining the environment in which the child spends his/her day and the interactions between children and adults in

the program/classroom. Observations would be conducted in programs using these tools and the results would be included in assigning a level in the QRIS. These observation tools are especially important because the results identify areas for improvement and supports can then be targeted to improve levels.

There are three Environment Rating Scales (ERS) measuring overall program quality. The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale is for child care center classrooms serving children 3-5 years old. The Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale is used in child care centers serving infants and toddlers. The Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale is for family child care programs serving mixed ages. The ERS are nationally normed, valid, and reliable tools focused on personal care, language and reasoning, interaction, activities, furnishings and display, program structure, and parent and staff needs.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observation tool developed for teachers of children 3-5 years old. CLASS focuses on the teacher interactions that really matter for children's development. It assesses a teacher's strengths and areas for growth across a wide variety of topics. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) provides a reliable, valid assessment of effective interactions. Research conducted in over 3,000 classrooms concludes that from pre-K programs into the third grade, children in programs with higher CLASS ratings realize greater gains in achievement and social skill development. The CLASS tool includes three domains of quality: emotional support, instructional support, and classroom organization.