

What is Parent Aware?

Parent Aware is the name commonly used for Minnesota’s voluntary rating system for child care and early learning programs. If a program chooses to be rated, Child Care Aware of Minnesota will assess the quality of the program and rate it on a scale of one to four stars, with four stars being the highest rating. The ratings are shared on Parent Aware’s website, which parents and guardians can use to search for child care and early learning programs.

Parent Aware is governed under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.142, which establishes a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). A QRIS is intended as a way for a state to assess and communicate the level of quality in the state’s child care and early learning programs and increase the supply of high quality programs. Federal law does not require states to have a QRIS, but states are allowed to use federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) quality dollars to establish and maintain a QRIS. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) administers Parent Aware, in coordination with the Minnesota Departments of Education (MDE) and Health (MDH). Parent Aware began as a pilot in 2007 in four areas of Minnesota and became available statewide on January 1, 2015.

Which child care and early learning programs are eligible for a rating?

The following types of programs are eligible to receive a Parent Aware rating: licensed family child care providers; licensed child care centers; public school prekindergarten programs; charter schools; and Head Start and center-based Early Head Start programs.

What is the rating process?

Parent Aware rates child care and early learning programs on whether they meet standards in five categories: (1) teaching and relationships with children; (2) relationships with families; (3) assessment and planning for each individual child; (4) professionalism; and (5) health and well-being. Programs are eligible for different rating pathways (Table 1), and the length of time it takes to obtain a rating varies by pathway. In general, once a program receives a rating, the rating is valid for two years.

Table 1: Parent Aware Rating Pathways

Rating Pathway	Programs Eligible for Pathway
Full-rating: Process to earn 1, 2, 3, or 4 stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Licensed family child care and child care centers
Accelerated: Streamlined process to earn 4 stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Licensed, accredited family child care and child care centers▪ Public school preschool programs that meet School Readiness program or voluntary prekindergarten requirements▪ Charter school early learning programs officially recognized by MDE
Automatic: Automatically earn 4 stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Head Start and center-based Early Head Start programs and partners▪ Voluntary prekindergarten programs and partners
Expedited: Streamlined process to earn 3 or 4 stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Licensed child care centers that meet specified criteria and whose owner oversees multi-site child care centers with 3- or 4-star ratings

Source: Parent Aware, “Choose Your Path,” at <https://www.parentaware.org/programs/choose-your-path/#/>, accessed July 29, 2020.

Do ratings affect state payments to early childhood programs?

Yes, the ratings affect two programs: early learning scholarships and child care assistance. Parent Aware ratings are the basis for eligibility and reimbursement for early learning scholarships, which help lower-income families with the cost of sending children to child care or early learning programs. In general, a program must have a Parent Aware rating—any star level—to accept an early learning scholarship on behalf of a child. As star ratings increase, so does the size of the scholarship a program can accept. In recent years, including fiscal year 2020, a program with a 4-star rating can receive up to \$7,500 per child; a program with a 3-star rating can receive up to \$5,000 per child; a program with a 1- or 2-star rating can receive up to \$4,000 per child; and a program in a full-rating pathway cohort (but not yet rated) can receive up to \$3,000 per child.

Parent Aware ratings increase reimbursement under Minnesota's child care assistance programs, which subsidize the child care and early learning expenses of lower-income families. A Parent Aware rating is not required to accept child care assistance; however, programs with 3- or 4-star ratings can receive increased reimbursement rates under the child care assistance programs. A 3-star rating can earn up to a 15 percent higher reimbursement rate and a 4-star rating can earn up to a 20 percent higher reimbursement rate.

How is Parent Aware funded?

In state fiscal year 2020, Parent Aware was funded through a state appropriation of \$1.75 million and an allocation of \$8.5 million of federal CCDF quality dollars.

How many programs in Minnesota have ratings?

As of June 30, 2020, there were 2,821 Parent Aware-rated programs in Minnesota. Statewide, about 28 percent of programs eligible to be rated have a rating. But, as shown in Table 2, the likelihood of being rated varies considerably by program type.

Table 2: Parent Aware-Rated Programs in Minnesota, as of June 30, 2020

Program Type	Total	Parent Aware-Rated	
		Number	Percent
Public school prekindergarten	750	716	96%
Head Start & center-based Early Head Start	274	274	100%
Licensed, accredited child care centers	364	335	92%
Licensed, nonaccredited child care centers	1,193	286	24%
Licensed, accredited family child care	19	13	68%
Licensed, nonaccredited family child care	7,535	1,197	16%
Total	10,134	2,821	28%

Source: Develop, "Fast Facts," at <https://www.developtoolmn.org/fastfacts.html>, accessed July 29, 2020.



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