

Parent Aware is the name commonly used for Minnesota’s voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for child care and early learning providers. In general, 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 providers and increase the supply of high quality providers.

Parent Aware is governed under [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.142](#), and it is administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), 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 gradually expanded to become available statewide on January 1, 2015. Federal law does not require states to have a QRIS, but states are allowed to use federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) dollars to establish and maintain a QRIS.

In state fiscal year 2020, Parent Aware was funded by a \$1.75 million state appropriation and \$10.4 million from federal CCDF dollars.

How it works

The following types of providers 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.

If a provider chooses to be rated, Child Care Aware of Minnesota assesses the quality of the provider and rates it on a scale of one to four stars, with four stars being the highest rating. The providers are rated 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. Providers 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 provider receives a rating, the rating is valid for two years. The ratings are shared on Parent Aware’s website, which parents and guardians can use to search for child care and early learning providers.

Table 1: Parent Aware Rating Pathways

Rating Pathway	Providers 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 8, 2021.

Ratings and payments to child care and early learning providers

Parent Aware ratings affect payments to providers under the early learning scholarships program and the child care assistance program. Under each program, monetary assistance is provided to child care and early learning providers on behalf of eligible, low-income children. For a provider to receive an early learning scholarships payment, the provider must have a Parent Aware rating (any star level), and the higher the rating, the larger the scholarship payment for which the provider is eligible. A provider is not required to have a Parent Aware rating to receive child care assistance payments; however, a provider with a 3-star rating can earn up to a 15 percent higher child care assistance reimbursement rate and a provider with a 4-star rating can earn up to a 20 percent higher child care assistance reimbursement rate.

Rated providers

As of June 30, 2021, there were 2,939 Parent Aware-rated providers in Minnesota. Statewide, about 31 percent of providers eligible to be rated have a rating. But, as shown in Table 2, the likelihood of being rated varies considerably by provider type.

Table 2: Parent Aware-Rated Providers in Minnesota, as of June 30, 2021

Provider Type	Total	Parent Aware-Rated	
		Number	Percent
Public school prekindergarten	752	715	95%
Head Start & center-based Early Head Start	270	270	100%
Licensed, accredited child care centers	410	323	79%
Licensed, nonaccredited child care centers	1,132	435	38%
Licensed, accredited family child care	16	11	69%
Licensed, nonaccredited family child care	6,942	1,185	17%
Total	9,522	2,939	31%

Source: Develop, "Fast Facts," at <https://www.develop.mn.org/numbers-at-a-glance/index.jsp>, accessed September 22, 2021.

Recent legislative changes

The 2021 legislature directed DHS to study Parent Aware in two ways. First, DHS must conduct outreach among child care and early learning providers to identify barriers that prevent them from pursuing a Parent Aware rating. DHS must report its findings and a plan for reducing the barriers to the legislature by March 1, 2022. Second, DHS must arrange an independent evaluation of Parent Aware's effectiveness and impact on outcomes such as children's progress toward school readiness, the quality of the child care and early learning workforce, and parents' ability to access and use meaningful information about the quality of child care and early learning providers. The evaluation findings and DHS recommendations for Parent Aware revisions and potential future evaluations must be reported to the legislature by December 31, 2024.



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