

Parent Aware is the name commonly used for Minnesota’s voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early care and learning programs. In general, a QRIS is intended as a way for a state to assess and communicate the level of quality among the state’s early care and learning programs and increase the supply of high-quality programs.

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 Departments of Education (MDE) and Health (MDH). 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 recent years, the state has appropriated \$1.75 million each fiscal year to Parent Aware and has provided supplementary funding for specified activities in some fiscal years. Additionally, DHS typically allocates federal CCDF funds to Parent Aware each year.

How it works

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

If a program chooses to be rated, Child Care Aware of Minnesota assesses the quality of the program and rates it on a scale of one to four stars, with four stars being the highest rating. Programs are eligible for different rating pathways (see 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. The ratings are shared on Parent Aware’s website, which parents and guardians can use to search for early care and learning providers.

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 providers and child care centers, including Tribally licensed programs
Accelerated: Streamlined process to earn 4 stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed, accredited family child care providers and child care centers Public school preschool programs that meet specified requirements Charter school early learning programs officially recognized by MDE
Automatic 4 stars: 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 June 21, 2023.

Early learning scholarships and child care assistance

Parent Aware ratings affect early learning scholarship and child care assistance payments. Both programs make payments to early care and learning programs on behalf of eligible, low-income

children. For an early care and learning program to receive a scholarship payment, the program must participate in Parent Aware, and the higher the rating, the larger the scholarship payment for which the program is eligible. An early care and learning program is not required to have a Parent Aware rating to receive child care assistance payments; however, a program with a 3-star rating can earn up to a 15 percent higher child care assistance reimbursement rate and a program with a 4-star rating can earn up to a 20 percent higher rate.

Rated programs

As of March 31, 2023, there were 2,806 Parent Aware-rated programs in Minnesota. Statewide, about 31 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 March 31, 2023

Program Type	All	Parent Aware-Rated	
		Number	Percent
Public school prekindergarten	745	722	97%
Head Start & center-based Early Head Start	279	267	96%
Licensed child care centers	1,594	762	48%
Licensed family child care providers	6,329	1,055	17%
Total	8,947	2,806	31%

Source: Develop, "Fast Facts," at <https://www.developmn.org/numbers-at-a-glance/index.jsp>, accessed June 1, 2023.

Recent legislation

The 2023 Legislature established an automatic one-star Parent Aware rating for licensed family child care providers, licensed child care centers, and Tribally licensed programs and directed DHS to develop a process that allows programs to opt out of the automatic one-star rating. DHS intends to implement these requirements beginning July 1, 2026.

The 2021 Legislature directed DHS to conduct two evaluations of Parent Aware. DHS completed one evaluation, submitting a report to the legislature in March 2022 that identifies barriers that prevent child care providers from pursuing Parent Aware ratings and proposes a plan for reducing the barriers. The second evaluation is ongoing and directs DHS to 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 early care and learning workforce, and parents' ability to access and use meaningful information about program quality. DHS must present findings and recommendations to the legislature by December 31, 2024.



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