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Minnesota's early care and learning quality rating system gaining foothold

Data shows progress in expanding tool that recognizes early learning best practices; still more work to be done

A recent study from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Participation in Parent Aware Ratings across Minnesota*, shows that Parent Aware, Minnesota's voluntary quality rating and improvement system, is gaining ground across the state, but there is still work to do to recruit more programs. A four-year statewide rollout of Parent Aware was completed in January of 2015, and it will require more time to ensure every county has a desired number of participating programs. Parent Aware is a voluntary program that promotes research-based best practices among participating programs through training and coaching, then rates them on a scale of one to four stars.

"Making sure our youngest learners have the very best educational experiences is critical to giving them the greatest chance at success and closing achievement gaps," said Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson. "As this report shows, there is still more that needs to be done. That's why I am so pleased Gov. Dayton included funding in his budget for the continuation of Parent Aware."

Recent investments from the governor and Legislature have helped encourage child care providers to join and achieve higher ratings. Those with three and four stars are paid higher rates by the state's Child Care Assistance Program, and all Parent Aware-participating programs are accessible for parents whose children have an Early Learning Scholarship. These ratings allow families to easily identify programs that are implementing practices that best prepare children for school and life.

The governor's proposed FY 2016-2017 budget includes \$3.5 million to sustain Parent Aware. In 2013, the governor and Minnesota Legislature invested nearly \$20 million to increase rates for high quality child care providers.

Parent Aware began its statewide rollout in 2012 and, as of December 31, 2014, 31 percent (5,261 children) receiving child care assistance, age 0-5 and not yet in kindergarten, were enrolled in three- or four-star rated programs. This is an increase from 28 percent reported for December 31, 2013. There are close to 1,900 rated programs out of about 12,000 programs total. By the end of the year, it is anticipated that nearly 2,500 programs will be rated.

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Report findings:

The new report on Parent Aware program participation focuses on some of the programs eligible for Parent Aware, the 1,638 child care centers and 9,732 family child care homes licensed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Counties/regions with the highest participation rates

- Counties that have already fully implemented Parent Aware Ratings have the highest participation rates of licensed programs.
 - In counties that fully implemented in 2012, 22 percent of licensed programs have volunteered to be rated.
 - In counties that fully implemented in 2015, the participation rate is lower but expected to grow over time.
- Success stories include:
 - Itasca County, where 35 percent of programs are already rated. Another 5 percent have committed to being rated in 2015.
 - Clearwater County, where 29 percent of programs are already rated. Another 6 percent have committed to being rated in 2015.
 - Kanabec County, where there are only 30 eligible licensed programs. Currently, none are rated, but 11 have committed to seeking a rating in 2015.
 - Carlton County, where full implementation occurred in 2014. Already, 22 percent of programs are rated and another 12 percent have committed to seeking a rating in 2015.

Counties/regions with the lowest participation rates

- Counties that have not yet fully implemented Parent Aware have the lowest participation rates.
- Rock County is the only county in Minnesota that has no rated programs and no programs currently signed up to participate. This county will fully implement Parent Aware in 2015.

The full report, [Participation in Parent Aware Ratings across Minnesota \(PDF\)](#), is available online.