Parent Aware policy updates and frequently asked questions for child care providers

Date: June 13, 2022
To: Licensed child care providers participating in Parent Aware
From: Minnesota Department of Human Services

RE: Temporary Parent Aware policy changes due to COVID-19, extended

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary policy changes to Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, Parent Aware, have been in place since April 27, 2020 to protect the health and safety of child care providers and the families they serve. These changes have allowed providers to maintain their Parent Aware Ratings or to participate in Parent Aware while being temporarily closed or otherwise affected by the pandemic. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) last notified child care providers participating in Parent Aware on Dec. 15, 2021 of continued temporary Parent Aware policy changes in effect until June 30, 2022.

This memo is to inform licensed child care providers participating in Parent Aware that the following temporary policy changes have been extended through Dec. 31, 2022.

- The requirement that programs must be actively serving children to maintain their Parent Aware Rating is waived.
- Programs with Parent Aware Ratings scheduled to expire on or before Dec. 31, 2022 can have end dates extended for six months.
- The CLASS observation requirement for child care centers seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating is waived through Dec. 31, 2022.
- Building Quality and CLASS coaching, professional development advising and technical assistance services will be offered virtually (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, Vidyo, WebEx, phone, and email), and requirements to meet in person are waived.
- For Accelerated Pathway programs, deadlines to submit a renewed accreditation certificate are extended through Dec. 31, 2022.

The department recognizes the importance of helping child care providers safely serve families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In order to protect the health and safety of our essential child care providers, recommendations and guidance are being updated regularly on the Minnesota Department of Health’s Schools and Child Care: COVID-19 webpage. This information includes best practice public health recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health, and local case rates of COVID-19 infection. Licensed child care centers and family child care programs should follow the CDC COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs. Find links to public health guidance and other important information on the state’s Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) webpage. In addition, all licensed child care
providers are required to comply with licensing requirements regarding reporting, notification, and isolation as described in an Jan. 11, 2022 DHS Licensing communication to all license holders.

In compliance with the Stay Safe Plan, the department previously announced that the organizations it contracts with to provide child care training and coaching may decide whether or not it is safe to offer in-person training and coaching services in their local service areas.

Therefore, in some places in Minnesota, Building Quality and CLASS coaching, professional development advising, technical assistance services, and training may be offered in person. These services will also continue to be offered online (i.e. through Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, Vidyo, phone and email).

Frequently Asked Questions about Full-Ratings, Accelerated Ratings and Expedited Ratings

Why were temporary changes made to Parent Aware policies?

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many programs have stayed open while using best practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, some child care providers have closed temporarily. Updated guidance for child care license holders was issued by the department on Jan. 11, 2022 regarding reporting, notification, and isolation.

Child care programs that have temporarily closed may have no staff available, impacting their ability to continue participating in Parent Aware. Those that have stayed open have adapted their programs to meet families’ needs, often with fewer staff, and staff available are focused on adjusting to the emergency with less time to attend to Parent Aware deadlines required to maintain their ratings.

If temporary policy changes were not made, many programs would have lost their ratings or received a lower rating. That would result in financial impacts for families, such as lower reimbursement rates for the Child Care Assistance Program, or loss of scholarships from the Minnesota Department of Education’s Early Learning Scholarships program.

My program is closed due to COVID-19. Is it still eligible for a Parent Aware rating?

Yes. Rated programs that are temporarily closed, or not currently serving young children, are allowed to maintain a Parent Aware rating as long as they hold an active or pending reopening Minnesota Department of Human Services license or tribal license in good standing. For programs that have ratings or accreditations that are due to expire, and for those actively seeking a rating, there are flexible options below to help programs continue to participate in Parent Aware.

Can I still get Building Quality and CLASS coaching, professional development advising and technical assistance?

Yes. Programs are encouraged to continue their participation in Parent Aware, even if they are not currently serving children.
Building Quality and CLASS coaching, professional development advising and technical assistance services continue to be offered. Services are available virtually (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, Vidyo, WebEx, phone, email), or in some places in-person services may be offered. Contact your Parent Aware Quality Coach to learn more about the types of services available in your area.

**What are changes are being made to the Building Quality policy?**

Child care programs in the July 2022 Building Quality Cohort that are unable to participate may cancel by October 31, 2022, and join a future Building Quality Cohort.

Child care programs in the July 2022 Building Quality Cohort that are “stacking” their second sequential Building Quality Cohort and not rated also have the option to cancel by October 31, 2022, and apply for the January 2023 Building Quality Cohort at any time prior to the Parent Aware application deadline of Dec. 10, 2022.

Full-Rated programs that are stacking Building Quality for a second sequential cohort with a Rating expiration date of June 30, 2023, are required to enter the January 2023 Full-Rating Cohort to avoid a lapse in rating.

**How do I meet my Parent Aware training requirements?**

Online training continues to be offered through Develop and the Child Care Aware Eager-to-Learn online platform. In most cases, training that meets Parent Aware training requirements is offered for free or at a low cost. For registration and information on Eager-to-Learn, call 651-335-6658 or email ETLsupport@childcareawaremn.org.

In some places in Minnesota, in-person training options may also be available. Whenever possible, online training is recommended.

**Frequently Asked Questions about Full-Rating Pathway**

**What are the flexible options and deadline changes to earn a Full-Rating this year?**

Providers enrolled in the July 2022 Full-Rating Cohort can choose to stay in the cohort with standard submission deadlines and earn a rating effective Dec. 31, 2022, or they can move to the next cohort that starts Jan. 1, 2023.

**Option A: Earn a Rating with standard submission deadlines and case-by-case flexibility.**

For all Star Rating levels, programs may submit online through developtoolmn.org or mail in the Quality Documentation Portfolio (QDP) on or before Sept. 30, 2022, for a three- or four-star rating, or on or before October 31, 2022, for a one- or two-star rating.

- Once the QDP is submitted, if a program receives an incomplete notice from the Rating team, the program has up to 15 business days to respond and resubmit.
- If a program is unable to submit or resubmit by the deadlines, they should talk with their Quality Coach to discuss other options.
Option B: Move to next cohort and earn a Rating later.

Programs may choose to temporarily end their participation for any reason. Programs that wish to discontinue their participation in a cohort and start again Jan. 1, 2023, should talk with their Quality Coach and submit a Request to Change Participation Status form along with a new Parent Aware Participation Agreement by October 31, 2022.

Please note: If a program’s rating will expire Dec. 31, 2022, but it prefers to move to the next cohort, that program can request an extension of its current rating. Programs that extended ratings previously are permitted another extension to June 30, 2023, if needed, due to factors related to the public health crisis.

Can I request a new end date for my Parent Aware Full-Rating if it is scheduled to expire during the public health crisis?

Yes. If a Rated program has applied for the July 2022 Full-Rating Cohort to re-rate and is not able to submit its training evidence prior to its rating expiring on Dec. 31, 2022, it can request an extended end date to avoid a lapse in rating.

What is the modified policy?

Rated programs participating in the July 2022 Full-Rating Cohort that have ratings expiring on Dec. 31, 2022, have the option to have ratings extended to June 30, 2023. Programs that extended ratings prior to June 30, 2022, for a period of six months to 2½ years are permitted another extension to June 30, 2023, for a total extension of three years, if needed, due to factors related to the public health crisis.

What are the deadlines?

Programs that wish to exercise this option should talk with their Quality Coach. The coach can assist the program with completing and submitting a Request to Change Participation Status form by October 31, 2022, along with a signed Parent Aware Participation Agreement to join the January 2023 Full-Rating Cohort.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

Programs are required to earn a Parent Aware Rating by June 30, 2023, to avoid a lapse in rating.

How are CLASS observations happening for a center seeking a three- or four-star rating through the Full-Rating process?

There are no CLASS observations happening at this time. The CLASS observation requirement for child care centers with preschool classrooms that are seeking a three- or four-star rating is waived through Dec. 31, 2022.
What is the modified policy?

Child care programs with preschool classrooms seeking a three- or four-star rating will not have a CLASS observation, and indicator scores will be adjusted appropriately. This policy applies to programs in the January 2020, July 2020, January 2021, July 2021, January 2022, and July 2022 Full-Rating Cohorts. See below for how this temporary policy impacts programs in the Expedited Pathway.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

If funding is approved, programs will have the opportunity to receive an optional CLASS observation once observers are permitted to visit programs. The purpose of an optional CLASS observation would be to support professional growth and continuous quality improvement, but would not be included in the program’s rating.

Frequently Asked Questions about Accelerated Rating Pathway

Can I request a new end date for my Parent Aware Accelerated Rating if it is scheduled to expire during the public health crisis?

Yes. If an accredited program with an Accelerated Rating is not able to submit its training evidence prior to its rating expiring on or before Dec. 31, 2022, it can request an extension to avoid a lapse in rating.

What is the modified policy?

Rated programs participating in the July 2022 Full-Rating Cohort that have ratings expiring on Dec. 31, 2022, have the option to have ratings extended to June 30, 2023. Programs that extended ratings prior to June 30, 2022, for a period of six months to 2½ years are permitted another extension to June 30, 2023, for a total extension of three years, if needed, due to factors related to the public health crisis.

What do I need to do?

Providers who wish to exercise this option should contact Nikki Lepowsky, quality improvement coordinator for Child Care Aware of Minnesota, by phone at 651-290-9704 (ext. 116) or by email at nikki@childcareawaremn.org, for help with completing and submitting a Request to Change Participation Status form and a participation agreement to the Parent Aware Rating Team.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

If possible, providers should request a six-month extension to their rating end date \textit{at least two weeks prior to expiration} to avoid a lapsed rating. Lapsed ratings may result in changes to eligibility for higher Child Care Assistance Program reimbursement rates or for Early Learning Scholarships administered by the Minnesota Department of Education.
Can I request an extension to submit a renewed accreditation certificate if it will expire during the public health crisis?

Yes. If a rated child care program’s accreditation expires on or before Dec. 31, 2022, it can request an extension to submit an updated accreditation certificate with no lapse of its Accelerated Rating.

What is the modified policy?

Accredited child care providers who have an Accelerated Rating with an accreditation that will expire on or before Dec. 31, 2022, due to factors related to the public health crisis, can request a six-month extension to provide a new accreditation certificate.

What is the modified deadline?

The deadline to submit a new accreditation certificate to confirm current accreditation is modified from 30 days to six months after the accreditation’s expiration date.

What do I need to do?

Providers should contact Nikki Lepowsky, quality improvement coordinator for Child Care Aware of Minnesota, by phone at 651-290-9704 (ext. 116) or by email at nikkil@childcareawaremn.org, for help with completing and submitting the request to the Parent Aware Rating Team.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

If possible, providers should request a six-month extension to provide a new accreditation certificate prior to expiration to avoid a lapsed rating. Lapsed ratings may result in changes to eligibility for higher Child Care Assistance Program reimbursement rates or for Early Learning Scholarships administered by the Minnesota Department of Education.

Frequently Asked Questions about Expedited Rating Pathway

If my program has an Expedited Rating and is due for the six-month review to maintain the rating, can we get an extension?

Yes. If a program with an Expedited Rating is not able to meet the training requirements prior to its six-month rating review occurring on or before Dec. 31, 2022, it can request an extended rating review date to avoid a lapse in rating.

What is the modified policy?

Rated programs that have ratings expiring on or before Dec. 31, 2022, have the option to have their ratings extended for six months.

Programs with an Expedited Rating that are scheduled to be reviewed at six months on or before Dec. 31, 2022 have the option to have that review date extended six months.
What do I need to do?

Programs with Expedited Ratings that wish to exercise this option should contact Nikki Lepowsky, quality improvement coordinator for Child Care Aware of Minnesota, by phone at 651-290-9704 (ext. 116) or by email at nikkil@childcareawaremn.org, for help with completing and submitting a Request to Change Participation Status form to the Parent Aware Rating Team.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

If possible, providers should request a six-month extension at least two weeks prior to their rating review date to avoid a lapsed rating. If an extension is not requested, the program will be reviewed for the training requirements. If it meets the requirements the rating will be maintained. If it does not, the rating will be revoked and the program will need to apply for the next Full-Rating Cohort. If the program has earned an accreditation, it can apply and submit for an Accelerated Pathway Rating. Lapsed ratings may result in changes to eligibility for higher Child Care Assistance Program reimbursement rates or for Early Learning Scholarships administered by the Minnesota Department of Education.

If my rating is expiring soon, and I cannot meet the requirements to re-rate at this time, can I request a new end date for my Parent Aware Expedited Rating?

Yes. If a program with an Expedited Rating is not able to submit its evidence to re-rate prior to its rating expiring, it can request an extended end date to avoid a lapse in rating.

What is the modified policy?

Rated programs that have a confirmed Expedited Rating expiring on or before Dec. 31, 2022, have the option to have their ratings extended for six months.

Programs with an Expedited Rating that are scheduled to be reviewed at six months on or before Dec. 31, 2022, have the option to have that review date extended for six months (see above).

What do I need to do?

Programs with Expedited Ratings who wish to exercise this option should contact Nikki Lepowsky, quality improvement coordinator for Child Care Aware of Minnesota, by phone at 651-290-9704 (ext. 116) or by email at nikkil@childcareawaremn.org, for help with completing and submitting a Request to Change Participation Status form and participation agreement to the Parent Aware Rating Team.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

If possible, providers should request a six-month extension to their rating end date at least two weeks prior to expiration to avoid a lapsed rating. Lapsed ratings may result in changes to eligibility for higher Child Care Assistance Program reimbursement rates or for Early Learning Scholarships administered by the Minnesota Department of Education.
How are CLASS observations happening for a center seeking a Three-Star or Four-Star Rating through the Expedited Rating process?

There are no CLASS observations happening at this time. The CLASS observation requirement for child care centers with preschool classrooms that are seeking a three- or four-star rating is waived through Dec. 31, 2022.

What is the modified policy?

Child care programs with preschool classrooms seeking a three- or four-star rating will not have a CLASS observation, and indicator scores will be adjusted appropriately. This policy applies to programs in the January 2020, July 2020, January 2021, July 2021, January 2022, and July 2022 Full-Rating Cohorts, and programs with an Expedited Rating that will approach the six-month review prior to June 30, 2023.

What else should I know about this temporary change?

If funding is approved, programs will have the opportunity to receive an optional CLASS observation once observers are permitted to visit programs. The purpose of an optional CLASS observation would be to support professional growth and continuous quality improvement, but would not be included in the program’s rating.

Who should I contact with questions?

**Parent Aware questions**

To connect with your local Child Care Aware agency, call 888-291-9811, or go to https://www.childcareawaremn.org/contact-us/ to find the Child Care Aware agency nearest to you.

For general Parent Aware policy questions, contact the Minnesota Department of Human Services at DHS.Child.Care@state.mn.us.

**Child Care Assistance Program questions**

For case-specific questions, contact your local Child Care Assistance Program agency (county, tribe or other agency that administers the program). Local agencies must handle all specific case and payment actions, such as extending absent days or payments during closures.

For general Child Care Assistance Program policy questions, call the Minnesota Department of Human Services’ Child Care Assistance Provider Line at 651-431-4848, or email DHS.CCAP@state.mn.us.
**Early Learning Scholarship questions**

For questions regarding Pathway I scholarships, contact your local Area Administrator. The complete list of administrators can be found on the [Minnesota Department of Education website](http://www.mde.k12.mn.us).

For questions regarding Pathway II scholarships, email the Minnesota Department of Education at [PathwayII@state.mn.us](mailto:PathwayII@state.mn.us).

**Licensing questions**

Call the Child Care Provider Hotline at 1-888-234-1268.

- Option 1: Child care centers and certified child care providers
- Option 2: Family child care providers

**Child care during the COVID-19 pandemic**

For questions related to a positive COVID-19 case and quarantine guidance in your setting, email [health.schools.covid19@state.mn.us](mailto:health.schools.covid19@state.mn.us).

For testing-related questions, email [covid.childcare@state.mn.us](mailto:covid.childcare@state.mn.us).

For child care stabilization application questions, call Child Care Aware at 651-290-9704 or email [supportfunds@childcareawaremn.org](mailto:supportfunds@childcareawaremn.org).

**Child Care Stabilization Grant questions**

For questions about child care stabilization grant payments, email [dhs.child.care@state.mn.us](mailto:dhs.child.care@state.mn.us).