Parent Aware policy updates and frequently asked questions for early childhood programs

Date: June 13, 2022

To: School districts, school-based prekindergarten programs, charter schools and their licensed child care partners, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs and their licensed child care partners 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 December 15, 2021 of continued temporary Parent Aware policy changes that will be in effect until June 30, 2022.

This memo is to inform school districts, school-based prekindergarten programs and their licensed child care partners, charter schools and their licensed child care partners, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs and their licensed child care partners participating in Parent Aware that the following temporary policy changes have been extended through December 31, 2022.

- The requirement that programs must be actively serving children to maintain their Parent Aware rating is waived.
- Programs with Parent Aware ratings that are scheduled to expire on or before December 31, 2022, can have those end dates extended to December 31, 2022.
- Deadlines to meet professional development requirements are extended to December 31, 2022.
- All technical support to earn or maintain a Parent Aware rating will continue to be offered virtually (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, Vidyo, WebEx, phone, and email).

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 now required to follow three directives regarding reporting, notification, and isolation and quarantine requirements as a part of licensing compliance and as described in a Jan. 11, 2022 DHS Licensing communication to all license holders.

Frequently Asked Questions

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.

School-based prekindergarten programs, Head Start programs and child care program partners that have temporarily closed may have no staff available to continue participating in Parent Aware. Those that have stayed open have adapted their programs to meet families’ needs, often with fewer staff. Staff who are 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 to Parent Aware had not been made, many districts, charter schools, Head Start programs and child care program partners would lose their ratings or receive 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 prekindergarten program is closed due to COVID-19. Is it still eligible for a Parent Aware rating?

Yes. Rated prekindergarten programs that are temporarily closed, or not currently serving young children, due to COVID-19 are allowed to maintain an existing Parent Aware rating or seek a new one. There are flexible options for both below to help programs continue to participate in Parent Aware.

Can I still get technical assistance?

Yes. Programs are encouraged to continue their participation in Parent Aware, even if they are not serving children. All technical assistance services will be offered virtually. (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Skype, phone, WebEx and email).
Frequently Asked Questions about Automatic Ratings

(Includes center-based Early Head Start and Head Start programs and their child care partners, and voluntary pre-K programs and their child care partners with Automatic Ratings)

What does my program need to do to maintain a Parent Aware Automatic Rating?

For voluntary prekindergarten programs:

All voluntary prekindergarten sites were rated on April 30, 2022 and went through Parent Aware’s re-rating process as part of the fiscal year 2023 voluntary prekindergarten application process in January 2022. Your updated expiration date is April 30, 2024.

If site changes occur within the two-year rating period, you will need to complete an addendum process to add, remove or change sites. Contact ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us to request an addendum.

For Head Start programs:

All Head Start programs complete the rating process as part of their State Fiscal Year 2022 Head Start Program Plan. Sites will have a rating date of July 1, 2021, and that rating will not expire until July 1, 2023. If site changes occur, you will need to complete an addendum process to add, remove or change sites. Contact ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us to request an addendum.

What else should I know about these temporary changes?

Any public programs that include a child care partner in their Parent Aware rating should be aware that these policy modifications apply to the partner’s rating as well.

Frequently Asked Questions about Accelerated Ratings

(Includes public school-based pre-K programs meeting School Readiness statute or VPK statute and their child care partners, and license-exempt charter school early learning programs officially recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education and their child care partners with Accelerated Ratings)

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 a school-based program with an Accelerated Rating is not able to submit its required training evidence prior to its rating expiring on or before December 31, 2022, the Minnesota Department of Education will request an extension to December 31, 2022, on its behalf to avoid a lapse in rating. Programs that are able to submit required training documents prior to their original Accelerated Rating expiration date, or prior to the extended December 31, 2022 date, should submit them along with their Parent Aware application and agreement.
**What is the modified policy?**

Programs that have ratings expiring on or before December 31, 2022, have the option to have their ratings extended until December 31, 2022. Programs that are due to re-rate after December 31, 2022, and anticipate issues with fulfilling and submitting their required documentation (including required training evidence) prior to their rating date should contact the Minnesota Department of Education at ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us.

**What do I need to do?**

The Minnesota Department of Education will coordinate with the Parent Aware Rating Team on behalf of programs that are unable to re-rate by the end of December. Contact ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us with any questions. Programs do not need to request an extension directly with Parent Aware.

**What else should I know about this temporary change?**

Any public programs that include a child care partner in their Parent Aware rating should be aware that this policy modification applies to the partner’s rating as well.

Public programs that have already have had one or more extensions will be contacted by the Minnesota Department of Education to develop a plan and timeline to complete their re-rating as close to June 30, 2022, as possible.

**Who should I contact with questions?**

**Parent Aware questions**

For Head Start and school-based programs questions, contact the Minnesota Department of Education at ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us.

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, contact 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.

For questions regarding Pathway II scholarships, contact the Minnesota Department of Education at MDE.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 questions

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

For testing-related questions, email covid.childcare@state.mn.us.

For child care stabilization application questions, call Child Care Aware at 651-290-9704 or email supportfunds@childcareawaremn.org.

For questions about child care stabilization grant payments, email dhs.child.care@state.mn.us.