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

Date: July 27, 2020
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

On March 13, 2020, Gov. Tim Walz declared a peacetime emergency to protect Minnesotans from COVID-19. As part of the state government response to the emergency, state agencies were asked to prioritize services and change program requirements to respond to the needs of Minnesotans during the crisis.

Temporary changes to Parent Aware policies were announced on April 27, 2020 and focused on the health and safety of child care providers and the families they serve. These changes allow providers to maintain Parent Aware Ratings or participate in Parent Aware while temporarily closed or otherwise affected by the peacetime emergency.

This memo provides information for 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, Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System. The following temporary policy changes during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency have been extended through Dec. 31, 2020.

- The requirement that programs must be actively serving children to maintain their Rating is waived.
- Programs with Ratings scheduled to expire on or before Dec. 30, 2020 will have the option to have end dates extended.
- Deadlines to meet professional development requirements are extended.
- All technical support to earn or maintain a Rating will be offered virtually (i.e. Zoom, Skype, Vidyo, phone, email).

Temporary policy changes became effective March 13, 2020.
Frequently Asked Questions

Why are temporary changes being made to Parent Aware policies?

Since the COVID-19 peacetime emergency was announced, and K-12 schools were closed, many prekindergarten programs and licensed child care providers have followed the lead of their local schools and also closed temporarily. Some programs have stayed open while using best practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19, prioritizing care for families with essential workers who continue to need to go to work.

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, 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 districts, charter schools, Head Start programs, and child care program partners would lose their Ratings or receive a lower Rating, triggering 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 Rating?

Yes. Rated prekindergarten programs that are temporarily closed, or not currently serving young children, are allowed to maintain a Parent Aware Rating. For programs that have Ratings or that are due to expire, and those actively seeking a Rating, there are flexible options (below) to make the best choice for their programs and continue participating 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 by virtual delivery (i.e., Skype, phone, Webex, and email).
Frequently Asked Questions – Automatic Ratings only
(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 submit or do to maintain the Parent Aware Automatic Rating?

**For voluntary prekindergarten programs:**

On March 23, 2020, the Minnesota Department of Education sent out a site confirmation list with the currently Rated sites and instructions to add or update sites. If you have already submitted your site list, your Rating is being processed. If you have not yet confirmed your site list, Ratings will proceed with your last known sites. If there are changes from your currently Rated sites, you will complete the addendum process to add, remove or change sites. Please contact ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us to request an addendum.

**For Head Start programs:**

All Head Start programs were Rated July 1, 2019, so are not due to expire until June 30, 2021. If there are changes from your currently Rated sites, you will complete the addendum process to add, remove or change sites. Please contact ParentAware.MDE@state.mn.us to request an addendum.

**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.

Frequently Asked Questions – Accelerated Ratings only
(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 their evidence prior to their Rating expiring on or before Dec. 30, 2020, the Minnesota Department of Education will request on their behalf an extended end date to their Rating of Dec. 31, 2020, to avoid a lapse in Rating. If programs are able to submit prior to their original expiration date or prior to the extended Dec. 31 date, they should submit their Parent Aware application, agreement and documentation including required training evidence.
What is the modified policy?

Programs that have Ratings expiring on or before Dec. 30, 2020, have the option to have their Ratings extended until Dec. 31, 2020. Programs that are due to Re-Rate after June 30, 2020, 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 Dec. 31. 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.

Who should I contact with questions?

Parent Aware questions

Head Start and school-based programs should 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

Contact your local Child Care Assistance Program agency (county, tribe or other agency that administers the program) with any questions. 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 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

Providing child care during COVID-19 peacetime emergency questions

Find COVID-19 child care information for Minnesota families and providers at mn.gov/childcare.

To learn about the Peacetime Emergency Child Care Grants, visit the Child Care Aware of Minnesota website or call 888-291-9811.