



Parent Aware Redesign: 2024 Public Engagement Report

Change Ideas for the Standards and Indicators

November 2024

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Introduction

Parent Aware is Minnesota’s quality rating and improvement system for child care and early education programs [Minn. Stat. 124D.142]. Parent Aware offers tools and resources to help families find quality child care and early education programs, and to help child care programs improve their practices. More information about Parent Aware is provided on the [ParentAware.org](https://parentaware.org) website.

In 2021, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) engaged in efforts to better understand and address inequities within Parent Aware. As part of this effort, the department collaborated with Parent Aware partners through the Parent Aware Racial Equity Action Plan workgroup and engaged with hundreds of child care programs across the state to identify and report on barriers and to create a plan for improvement. For more information about this process, see the [Parent Aware equity engagement webpage](#).

Guided by the recommendations made in the Parent Aware Racial Equity Action Plan, the department launched the Parent Aware Redesign in 2023 to implement the recommendations in the plan for improvement. This multi-year effort includes multiple projects and centers best practices and racial, cultural, linguistic, ability and geographic equity. The Redesign included a series of engagement events that included racially, culturally, linguistically, ability and geographically diverse individuals in the child care and early learning sector, between summer 2023 and summer 2024, helping the department establish priorities.

The Parent Aware Redesign is also informed by the Parent Aware evaluation. The evaluation was required by state law and funded by the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The goal of the evaluation was to understand the degree to which Parent Aware supports positive outcomes for Minnesota’s children, families, and early educators. For more information, see the [Parent Aware evaluation webpage](#).

Parent Aware Standards and Indicators

One of the projects in the Parent Aware Redesign, and the topic of this summary, focuses on updating the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators. See the Minnesota Department of Human Services website for more information about the [Parent Aware Redesign](#).

The Parent Aware Standards and Indicators are the quality measures used to award Star Ratings in the state. These Standards and Indicators were last updated in Minnesota in 2016. The Parent Aware Standards and Indicators project will review and update the Standards and Indicators to reflect best practices, ensure they promote child well-being, are culturally and linguistically affirming, and are meaningful for programs that participate. This project includes many opportunities for broad and diverse input from those who have worked with or in Parent Aware and may have experienced barriers in doing so. More information is provided on the department’s website about the project to revise the [Parent Aware Standards and Indicators](#).

This report summarizes the second round of engagement to inform updates to the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators, including:

- Process used to respectfully engage a diverse group of people with an interest in Minnesota’s child care and early education system,
- Analysis of the data collected through the engagement process, and
- Summary of findings from the second engagement.

The information gathered through this engagement process will be used to inform the project to revise to the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators.

Note on terminology in this report

Terms like “child care provider” or “early educator” are often used interchangeably to describe early learning programs, including home-based, center-based, and family-based care, as well as school-based preschool programs to foster children’s development. Historically, it was common for different terms to be used to distinguish home-based care and center-based care; for example, a popular term used to describe those who run home-based care was “family child care providers,” while those who run center-based care were often referred to as “teachers” or “early educators.” During the course of the engagement process for this report, the department received feedback that the term “early educators” is the preferred term among child care professionals to be used across all types of early care and education settings. We’ve implemented that feedback throughout, except we did not edit direct quotes from participants.

In addition, between the time this engagement process started and when this report was complete, the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) launched. Therefore, some of the work on this process happened at the Department of Human Services, and some happened at DCYF. For this reason, the term “department” is used to refer to the state agency that was overseeing this project at the time.

Engagement process and methods

Overview

The 2024 engagement process is a follow-up to [the first round of engagement on this topic in 2023](#). The 2024 engagement was conducted by the Minnesota Department of Human Services through contracts with Portage Partners Consulting and Child Trends. Portage Partners Consulting recruited and supported participants. Child Trends wrote the survey questions and collected and analyzed the data for this report. In this section, we describe the engagement process and our methods for gathering feedback on proposed changes to Parent Aware as part of the Redesign.

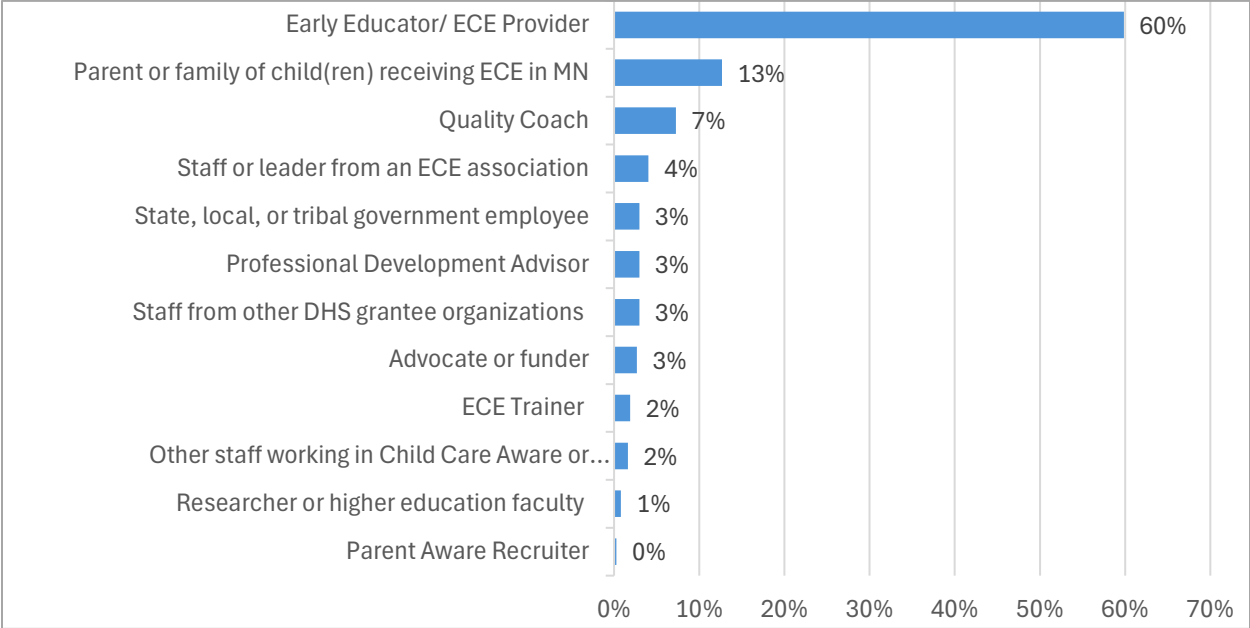
Parent Aware Ambassadors

The Parent Aware Ambassador Program was designed and launched during the first engagement in 2023 to build a community of interested and impacted individuals (particularly those from traditionally marginalized/under-served communities) to participate in and help shape the Parent Aware Redesign work. Starting in July 2023, Ambassadors received monthly newsletters including updates on the Parent Aware Redesign projects and opportunities to provide input.

In January 2024, an invitation was distributed to individuals who registered to be an Ambassador in the first round of engagement on Standards and Indicators in 2023, as well as those working in Parent Aware and networks of participating partners, early educators, and other community groups. The invitation asked recipients to sign up to be an Ambassador for the Parent Aware Redesign. By signing up, individuals could offer their input in the Redesign process/projects in two ways: by completing an individual survey and/or by facilitating group sessions with others who might want to provide input on the Redesign, such as staff at a child care and early education (CCEE) program, and then submitting feedback on behalf of the group. More information about these options is provided in the Survey Promotion section below.

Of the individuals who signed up to be Ambassadors, a total of 238 chose to participate in the second round of engagement for the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators project. These individuals included a diversity of relationships to Parent Aware. As shown in Figure A, Ambassadors were most often early educators (60%), a parent or family member of a child attending a CCEE program in Minnesota (13%), or Child Care Aware or Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care staff involved in administering Parent Aware (12%), including Quality Coaches, Professional Development Advisors, and other staff.

Figure A. Ambassadors’ primary relationship to Parent Aware (n=238)



Ambassadors came from all regions of the state (see Figure B) and were also diverse with respect to their racial/ethnic identities (see Figure C).

Figure B. Regions where Ambassadors live and work (n=238)

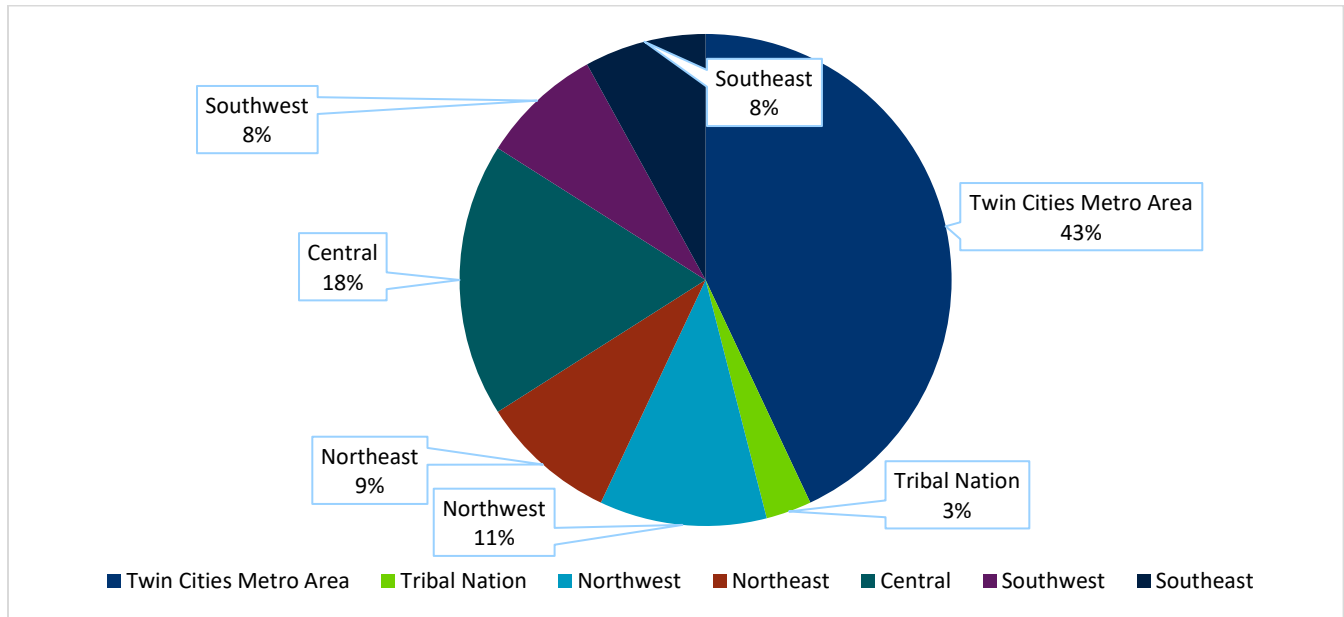


Figure C. Ambassadors’ racial/ethnic identities (n=238)

Race/ethnicity	Number of Ambassadors	Percent of Ambassadors
American Indian, Black or African American	1	.4%
American Indian, Native American, Indigenous, Alaska Native, or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	1.3%
American Indian, White	1	.4%
Asian or Asian American	3	1.3%
Asian, Black or African American	1	.4%
Asian or Asian American, White	1	.4%
Black or African American	13	5.5%
Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino/a	1	.4%
Black or African American, Somali, East African	2	.8%
Black or African American, White	1	.4%
Egyptian	1	.4%
Hispanic or Latino/a	11	4.6%
Hispanic or Latino/a, White	1	.4%
Prefer not to answer	16	6.7%

Race/ethnicity	Number of Ambassadors	Percent of Ambassadors
Somali or East African	4	1.7%
White (non-Hispanic)	178	74.8%

A limited group of Ambassadors were offered stipends if they indicated in the original Ambassador registration that they would be eligible for the stipend. These stipends were offered to compensate Ambassadors for time spent on the engagement to ensure a diversity of perspectives were included across race, ethnicity, language, role, geography and experience. There was a total of 60 group Ambassador stipends available and 30 individual stipends available. A total of 56 people were offered group Ambassador stipends, and a total of 29 people were offered individual Ambassador stipends. These individuals were offered \$25 per hour to compensate them for their time providing feedback, including participation in the survey. Group Ambassadors were eligible to receive a total of \$250 if all activities were completed.

Survey promotion

Individual survey

The individual survey link was sent in March 2024 to those Ambassadors who did not indicate that they had a discussion group to convene but that they would be willing to take the individual survey. Ambassadors received weekly emails with reminders to complete the survey, through April 2024. Ambassadors who were selected to receive stipends were sent individualized emails to encourage their participation.

Staff from the Minnesota Department of Human Services also invited members of the broader community to complete the individual survey and provide feedback on proposed changes to Parent Aware as part of the Parent Aware Redesign. The state sent an email to all licensed child care, school-based Pre-k, and Head Start programs inviting them to complete the individual survey and share it with their networks. All Ambassadors, including both those who did and did not facilitate a group session, were also asked to share the link to the individual survey with those in their networks who might be interested in the Parent Aware Redesign.

Group sessions

The Parent Aware Ambassador sign-up form asked Ambassadors to indicate if they had a group with whom they could share updates and gather feedback. Ambassadors who listed a group were emailed an invitation to participate in the engagement process as a group facilitator offering group sessions. These Ambassadors were invited to one of three orientation sessions and were provided with a facilitation guide and group survey link. The facilitation guide included written instructions on how to facilitate a session.

Several weeks later, the state held office hours to give Ambassadors leading a group discussion the opportunity to have any questions answered. Following the office hours, a document answering frequently asked questions was written and sent to Ambassadors to assist with group facilitation. Group leaders received weekly reminders to complete the group survey, and the state provided ongoing technical assistance to help Ambassadors

facilitate sessions as needed. The emails included a link to submit their group session results and a link to RSVP for one of three debrief sessions to discuss findings from the engagement.

Debrief sessions were held May 21 and 22 with all Ambassadors who facilitated a group. There were a total of 128 Ambassadors who signed up to lead group discussions. Among those, 57 Ambassadors facilitated a total of 93 group sessions, and 40 Ambassadors attended the debrief sessions. In the debrief sessions, department staff shared initial themes found in the survey responses. Ambassadors shared how the information shared resonated with what they heard during their group sessions.

Survey design

To facilitate this engagement process, survey protocols were developed to gather feedback on 10 topics—each of which outlined proposed changes to Parent Aware. The topics and proposed changes were first put forth by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and then refined in collaboration with Child Trends and Portage Partners Consulting. In refining the proposed changes to Parent Aware, emergent findings, needs and priorities were identified through the [Parent Aware Redesign](#) project, the [Parent Aware Racial Equity Action Plan](#), the [Parent Aware Evaluation](#), and various other past and ongoing engagement efforts. The central goal in developing the proposed changes was to address feedback and suggestions shared by early educators, coaches, families and other key stakeholders in past research and community engagement efforts related to Parent Aware.

Once the final set of 10 topics and proposed changes to Parent Aware were solidified, Child Trends developed surveys to gather feedback on the proposed changes. For each topic in the survey, staff outlined how Parent Aware currently operates with respect to that topic, the challenges with that approach, and proposed change(s) to address those challenges. The surveys included a combination of closed-ended questions (e.g., rating preferences on a scale) and open-ended questions (i.e., write-in responses) for each topic. This allowed Child Trends to conduct some quantitative analyses while also exploring more nuanced qualitative feedback respondents shared in respondents' own words. There were between three and five questions for each of the 10 topics, with 47 questions in total. Some questions repeated across multiple topics as appropriate, including:

- What is your initial reaction to this change? (closed-ended)
- What would you need to be successful if this change was made? (open-ended)
- Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted? (open-ended)
- Can you think of any unintended consequences—either positive or negative—when this change is implemented? (open-ended)
- What other ideas do you have to address the problem? (open-ended)

For some topics, some but not all of the above questions were asked, and different questions were included as appropriate for the specific context of the question. Respondents could answer questions for as many of the 10 topics as they wished, though it was recommended that all respondents answered questions about the first two topics. A copy of the survey and the questions included for each of the 10 topics can be found in Appendix I.

All respondents who either participated in a group session or completed the survey as an individual were asked to fill out a short demographic survey with questions about their relationship to Parent Aware and personal characteristics, such as where they live in the state, their racial/ethnic background, and their primary language. To help respondents understand the proposed changes and provide meaningful feedback, staff also developed supplemental materials, including handouts for Ambassadors to use in group sessions. These supplemental materials were developed and made available in case a respondent wanted additional information or contextual background about a proposed change.

Survey analysis methods

In determining the approach to analyze and synthesize respondents' feedback from this engagement effort, the Child Trends team considered several factors. The central methodological challenge faced was the sheer volume of open-ended responses to the engagement surveys. With almost 50 open-ended survey questions, each with around 300 or more responses, the total volume of text included in the dataset was unusually high. Further, many of the individuals who responded to the surveys left particularly detailed feedback—often including multiple sentences and touching on multiple themes in their responses to any given question. Additionally, to protect the privacy of the individuals who participated in the engagement, staff analyzed the data locally on a Child Trends secure server, rather than using ChatGPT or other internet-based large language models to process the data.

With these considerations in mind, the Child Trends team used short-text topic modeling to identify central themes in each question. Because several questions were asked for each of the 10 topics (e.g., for topic 1, respondents could share their overall reactions, possible barriers, and unintended consequences in three, separate questions), the Child Trends team originally approached the analysis at the question level. However, the same themes often emerged across those individual questions for a given topic; for example, similar points and issues came up across respondents' answers related to both possible barriers and unintended consequences. Therefore responses to individual questions were pooled together for many topics and then these questions were analyzed together in order to produce more robust and interpretable results. The full analytic process included the following steps:

- Step 1: First round of topic modeling
 - Combined questions within topics when there was substantial overlap in emergent themes
 - Pulled sample responses (i.e., text excerpts) for each topic
- Step 2: Substantive review to aid in refining the model and interpreting themes
 - Reviewed initial themes from Step 1 to suggest areas for refinement and clarification (e.g., refining keywords; grouping themes that were logically related or, disentangling themes to capture additional nuance; examining “cross-cutting” themes that came up across topics)
 - Identified additional analyses to explore for themes of interest (e.g., examining whether particular themes were brought up more often by certain respondent types)
- Step 3: Additional analysis
 - Based on insights provided in Step 2, conducted additional analyses and pulled additional examples as appropriate

Survey respondent characteristics

Response rates

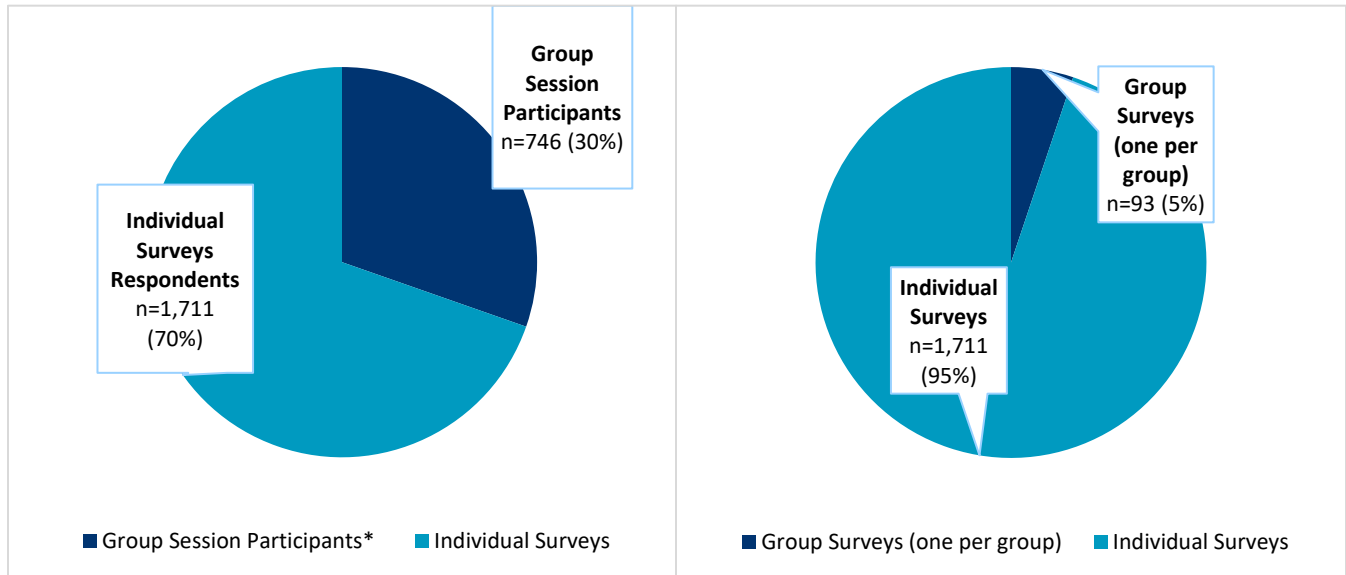


Figure 1. Completed surveys by source (n=1,804 surveys)

Figure 2. Individuals contributing to surveys by source (n=2,457 individuals)

There was a total of 1,804 responses to the survey. This includes 1,711 survey responses from individuals as well as responses from 93 group sessions,¹ which Ambassadors facilitated with a total of 746 participants² (see Figures 1 and 2).

Individuals who either completed the survey as an individual or participated in a group session were also asked to complete a brief demographic survey about their relationship to Parent Aware and personal characteristics. Of the 746 individuals who participated in a group session, only 293 completed the demographic survey, meaning that combined with the 1,711 respondents who completed the individual survey, a total of 2,004 people responded to the demographic survey. In the next section, key demographic characteristics of individuals who completed the demographic survey are summarized to contextualize the overall findings.

¹ A total of 57 Ambassadors facilitated these 93 sessions, as Ambassadors could facilitate multiple sessions.

² Ambassadors submitted one survey per group session regardless of the number of participants. So, though we received 2,004 completed surveys, a total of 2,457 individuals contributed to those survey responses.

Respondent roles

Table 1 shows the roles of respondents who completed the individual survey or participated in a group session. The majority of survey respondents were early educators (76%; more details about these respondents, including breakdowns by program type and other factors, are included later in this section). A few respondents had a role working with early educators, including quality coaches (4%), professional development advisors (1%), trainers (1%), and Parent Aware recruiters (<1%). Other respondents included staff from Parent Aware partner or state grantee organizations (3%) and government employees (2%).

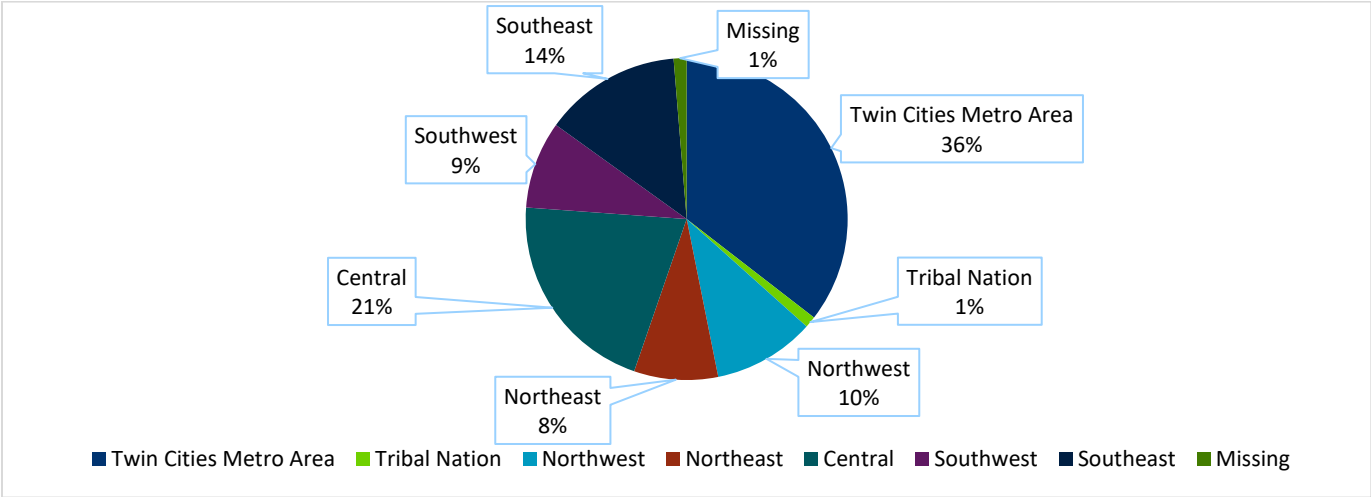
Table 1. Survey respondents’ roles (n=2,004)

Respondent roles	Percent of respondents
Early care and education provider (or “early educators”)	76%
Other role	8%
Quality coach	4%
Parent Aware partner/state grantee organization	3%
State, local, or Tribal government employee	2%
Parent or guardian	1%
Professional development advisor	1%

Geography

As shown in Figure 3, survey respondents came from across the state. The region with the largest percentage of respondents was the Twin Cities Metro area (36%), followed by Central (21%), and Southeast (14%).

Figure 3. Respondents’ geography, by region (n=2,004)



Race, ethnicity and language

Table 2 shows the racial and ethnic identities that survey respondents identified with, both overall and for those who responded to the individual survey compared to those who participated in a group session. Most respondents identified as White (non-Hispanic; 85%).

Table 2. Respondents’ race and ethnicity, by respondent type (n=2,004)

Race/ethnicity	All	Individual Survey Respondents	Group Session Participants
White (non-Hispanic)	85%	86%	80%
Black or African American	4%	4%	5%
Prefer not to answer	4%	4%	1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	3%	3%	6%
American Indian, Native American, Indigenous or Alaska Native	2%	2%	5%
Asian or Asian American	2%	2%	3%
Somali or East African	1%	1%	1%
Another racial/ethnic background	1%	1%	1%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%

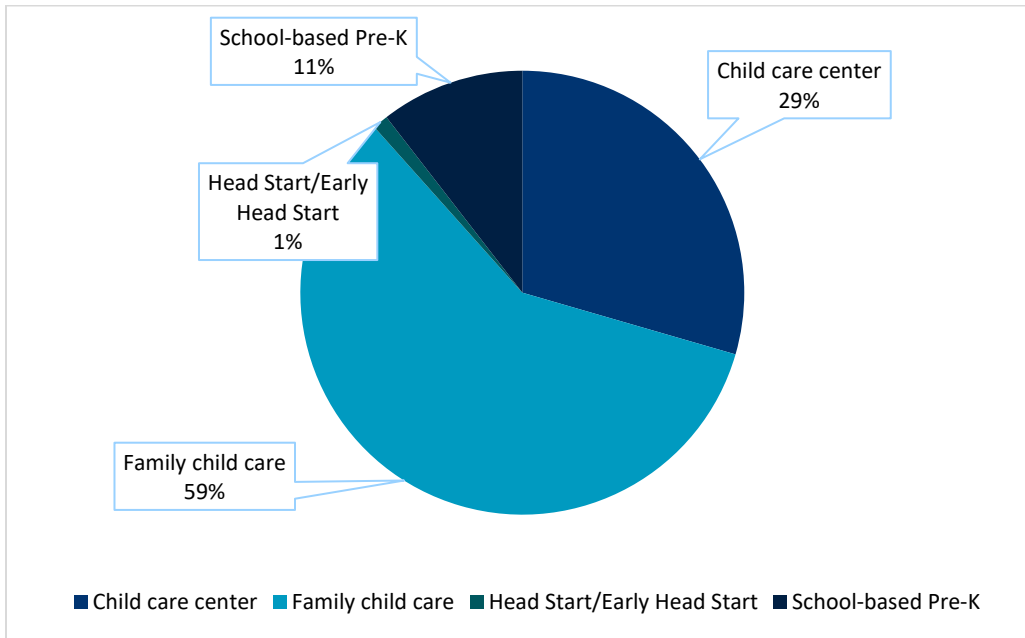
Note: Respondents could select multiple options, so percentages do not total to 100.

Nearly all respondents reported regularly speaking English (98%), though a few also reported speaking Spanish (4%), Somali (2%), Hmong (1%), or another language not listed (2%).

More about early educator respondents

The early educators who responded to the survey worked in various kinds of CCEE programs. More than half were family child care-based early educators (59%), around a third worked in a child care center (29%), and around one in 10 worked in a school-based Pre-K program (11%; see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Early educator respondents, by program type (n=1,518)

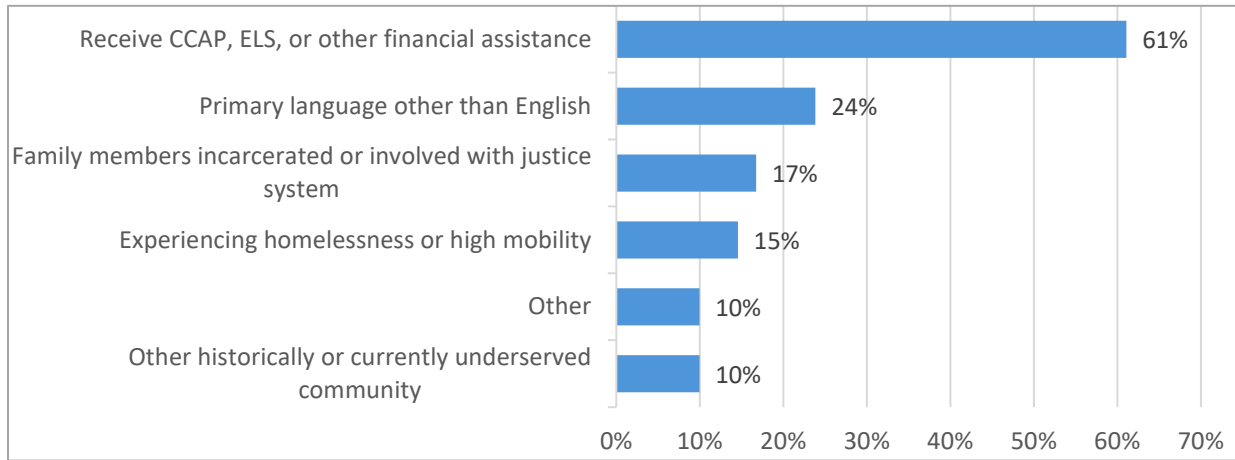


Two thirds of all early educators said their CCEE program was Parent Aware Rated (56%) or in the process of becoming Rated (36%). Almost all worked in licensed programs (94%).³

Providers also shared information about the children and families served in their programs. As shown in Figures 5 and 6, early educators reported serving a diverse group of children and families. Nearly two thirds of early educators serve children who receive child care subsidies, Early Learning Scholarships (ELS), or other financial assistance (61%), and one in four serve those whose primary language is not English (24%). Around one in five early educators serve children with family members who are incarcerated or involved in the justice system, and 15 percent serve those experiencing homelessness or high mobility.

³ Most programs were licensed through DHS or a county (93%), though a few were licensed by a Tribe (1%). Some programs, such as Head Start and school-based Pre-Kindergarten programs, are “license-exempt,” meaning they are not required to be licensed through the Minnesota Department of Human Services. For more information see the Parent Aware website: <https://www.parentaware.org/health-and-safety/#:~:text=Minnesota%20child%20care%20programs%20are,programs%20are%20monitored%20by%20counties>.

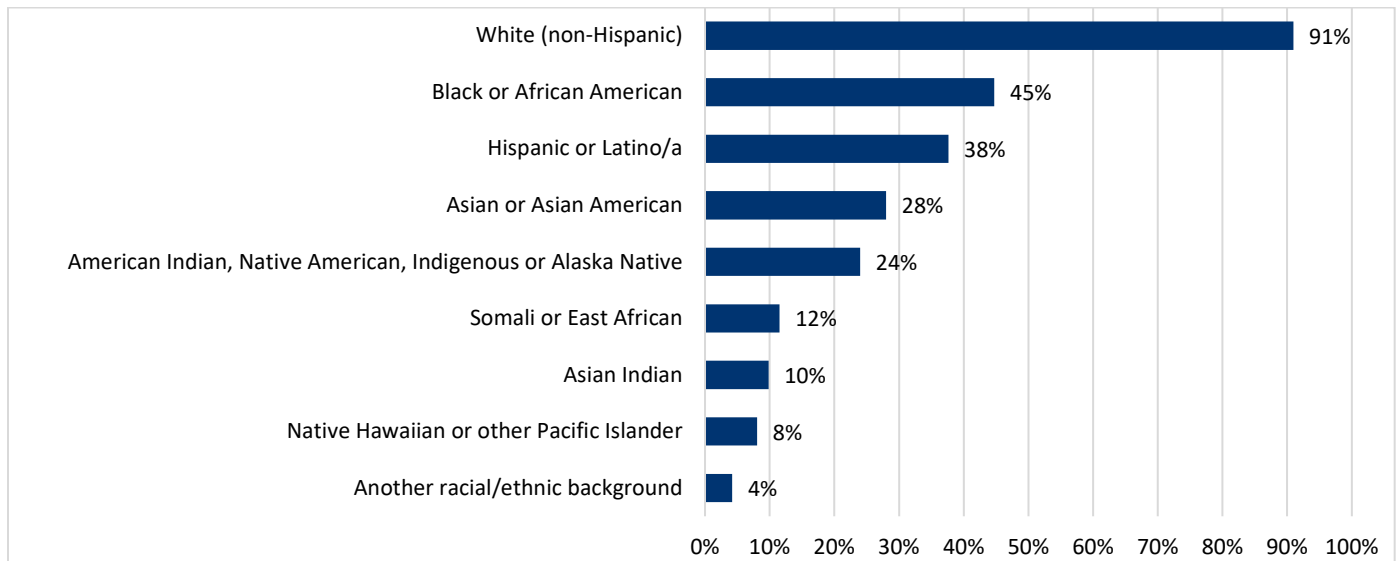
Figure 5. Percent of early educators serving children or families with varying characteristics (n=1,518)



Note: Respondents could select multiple options, so percentages do not total to 100.

Further, early educators reported serving children from varying racial/ethnic backgrounds. Figure 6 shows the percentage of early educators who reported serving one or more children with various racial/ethnic identities in their CCEE programs. The vast majority of early educators serve White (non-Hispanic) children (91%), around half serve Black or African American children (45%), around a third serve Hispanic or Latino/a (38%) and Asian or Asian American (28%) children, and around one in four serve Indigenous children (24%).

Figure 6. Percent of early educators serving children of varying racial/ethnic backgrounds (n=1,518)



Note: Respondents could select multiple options, so percentages do not total to 100. Respondents selected each option if they served at least one child with that racial/ethnic identity at their CCEE program.

Survey findings

Findings in this section are organized according to the 10 topics in the survey, including:

- **Topic 1:** Emphasizing quality recognition and continuous quality improvement over Ratings.
- **Topic 2:** Automatic One-Star Ratings.
- **Topic 3:** Aligning Rating requirements and monitoring processes for child care, Pre-K, and Head Start.
- **Topic 4:** Supporting programs to provide quality learning environments that are culturally, linguistically, and ability affirming.
- **Topic 5:** Supporting early educators to engage in ongoing family communication.
- **Topic 6:** Expanding observations and coaching on child-adult interactions in all settings, but without being scored for Ratings.
- **Topic 7:** Supporting early educators' and administrators' growth through customized training.
- **Topic 8:** Supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being.
- **Topic 9:** Practices to promote supportive behavior guidance.
- **Topic 10:** Expanding search options on the Parent Aware website to help families learn about what makes programs unique.

For each topic below, the information that was asked in the survey is provided including: 1) how it works currently in Parent Aware, 2) the problem with the way it works currently based on stakeholder feedback, and 3) the proposed change. This background information is provided in tables, highlighted in blue.

In this section, we describe key themes from the feedback respondents provided in the survey on each of the 10 topics. For each topic in the survey, we provided information about how Parent Aware currently operates, any known issues or challenges with that approach, and an idea for change to address the issues. Throughout this section, this context from the survey questions is provided before the key themes. Quotes from respondents' answers in the survey are included throughout to contextualize the findings.

In the analysis, Child Trends explored whether respondents' views on each topic varied based on their demographic characteristics, such as role, CCEE program type, region of the state, and racial/ethnic identity.⁴ We did not find that feedback on any of the 10 topics varied significantly based on respondents' racial/ethnic identity or geographic area. However, for some topics, themes from respondents who were early educators varied by program type (i.e., certain themes were expressed more often by family child care providers than

⁴ Because few respondents reported speaking a language other than English, we were not able to explore differences based on respondents' languages spoken.

center-based providers⁵, or vice versa). Any differences in themes on the basis of respondents’ CCEE program type are discussed in findings for each topic where relevant; if the findings for a topic do not describe variation, it is because the themes were expressed by respondents from across program types.

Topic 1: Emphasizing quality recognition and continuous quality improvement over ratings

Current	Parent Aware provides indicators of quality. Child care and early education providers submit evidence they meet the indicators, and this information is used to calculate Ratings. Ratings are displayed on the ParentAware.org website. Child care and early education providers receive support to submit evidence. Child care providers have access to a range of coaching options, with some receiving a small amount of help, and others receiving more.
Problem	Child care programs spend considerable time documenting and uploading the evidence to meet Parent Aware indicators of quality, and this time could be spent working with a coach assessing current practices and improving practices that benefit children, families, and their staff. Additionally, terms like “indicators” and “ratings” are abstract and can make the rating process feel stressful for programs.
Proposed Change	Parent Aware could focus more on recognizing programs’ strengths and emphasize continuous quality improvement over ratings. One way to accomplish this could be to revise some of the language and processes Parent Aware uses. For example, Parent Aware could drop the term “ratings” and instead call them “quality recognition levels.” And, instead of a complex set of “quality indicators” that programs have to submit extensive evidence for, Parent Aware could offer a simplified set of “quality practices” that programs will be supported to work toward. These quality practices could emphasize the experiences children, families, and early educators will have if these practices are used and recognize programs for making progress toward those practices with fewer or more flexible evidence requirements. Similarly, Parent Aware could provide more intensive coaching and other supports to help programs assess their quality, set goals, and work toward them.

⁵ In comparing themes shared by early educators, we examined responses from early educators in family child care programs compared to those in center-based programs. “Center-based programs” is inclusive of child care centers as well as Head Start, Early Head Start, and school-based Pre-Kindergarten programs.

More information can also be found in the Parent Aware Overview of Proposed Changes and Revised Quality Practices document (see Appendix II of this report). This document was provided to respondents to help them get a sense of how the new process would work and what the expectations would be in the context of the new framework with quality practices in three categories: 1) Children, 2) Families, and 3) Early Educators.

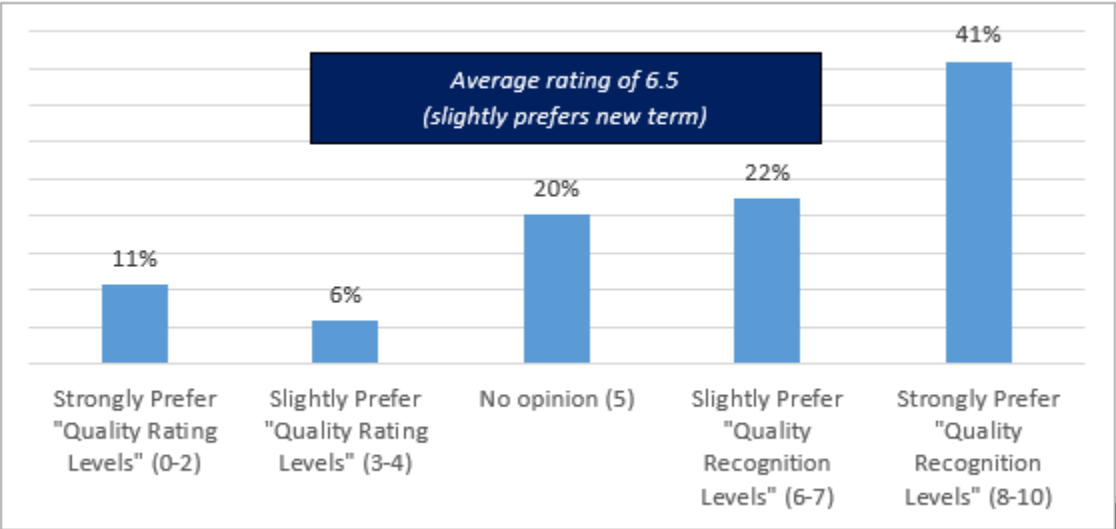
Topic 1 discussion

Some respondents like the proposed changes to Parent Aware terminology, but others aren't sure if the benefits would outweigh the costs.

Regarding proposed changes to Parent Aware terminology, respondents had mixed feelings. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, respondents slightly preferred the newly proposed terms "Quality Recognition Levels" and "Quality Practices" over the current terms "Quality Rating Levels" and "Quality Indicators," but only by a slim margin.

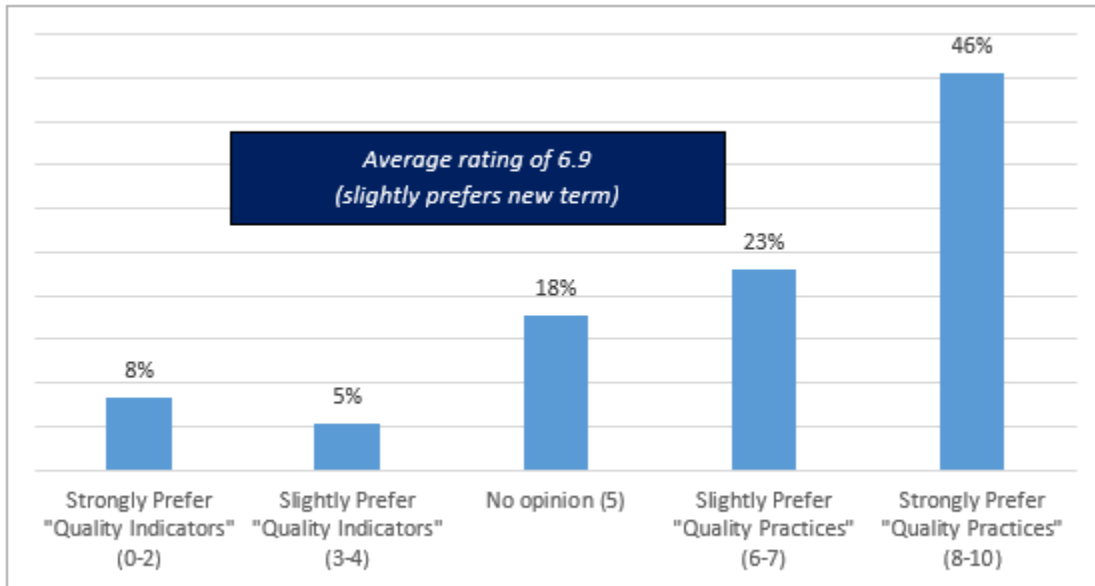
Regarding Quality Recognition vs. Quality Rating Levels, for example, nearly two thirds of respondents preferred the new term "Recognition Levels" (63%), compared to 17 percent who preferred the current term "Rating Levels," and 20 percent who had no opinion (see Figure 7). However, on a scale where 0 was strongly preferring the current term and 10 was strongly preferring the new term, the average respondent's rating was 6.5, representing a slight preference for the new term.

Figure 7. Respondents' preferences for current term "Quality Rating" vs. new term "Quality Recognition" (0=strongly prefer current term; 10=strongly prefer new term; n=855)



Similarly, most respondents said they preferred the newly proposed term "Quality Practices" over the current term "Quality Indicators" (69%), with only 13 percent preferring the current term and 18 percent having no opinion (see Figure 8). Interestingly, respondents' preferences for the new vs. old terms across both questions did not vary by characteristics such as role, program type, or Parent Aware Rating.

Figure 8. Respondents’ preferences for current term “Quality Indicators” vs. new term “Quality Practices” (0=strongly prefer current term; 10=strongly prefer new term; n=832)



Among respondents who preferred the newly proposed terms, some explained that the new terms seemed simpler and easier to understand. Others felt that the framing of “Quality Recognition” felt more supportive and/or less judgmental than “Quality Ratings.”

- “The word ‘recognition’ is more positive than rating. [It] seems to mirror the goals of a strengths-based approach. The word ‘practices’ better reflects actual care, relationships, and actions [happening in programs] than the word indicator. The change in wording seems more open and less regulative.”
- “Recognition is much less intimidating to programs than 'rating'. Rating feels like criticism. Quality practices is also a more simple, less intimidating framing for providers to understand.”

Among respondents who were not in favor of the new terms, most had concerns that changing terms people are already familiar with might lead to confusion and overwhelm—particularly among early educators, many of whom have already struggled to become familiar with Parent Aware’s current terms and processes. Other respondents were skeptical as to whether changes in terms would also lead to meaningful improvements in processes and how early educators experience Parent Aware, or to changes in how families view and understand Ratings. For these reasons, some noted that the changes to terms might not be worth the administrative costs.

- “I don't know that either change is worth the administrative hassle. Indicators and Ratings are words commonly used in education; we should stick with them because it elevates our field. We are talking about things that can be measured and then using measurements to create the ratings.”

- “The ideas around this still seems to be a formal system, so just changing the term seemed like a tricky way to make people think something changed, but really did not (levels/ratings [are] still the same idea).”
- “I think that changing the wording from ratings to levels doesn't really make a big difference. Programs will still appear to have "lower quality" if either of these systems are used. We don't want a program to appear on the website as having lower quality (like a hotel rating system) just because they haven't completed as many of the quality practices.”
- “I think change, especially a lot of changes, are overwhelming and make things more confusing. We have worked with [Parent Aware] as it is, adapted to the requirements, and understand what is expected now, the way it is.”

Respondents appreciate efforts to craft simpler and more flexible Quality Practices, but many have questions about how that flexibility would be implemented, noting the importance of clear messaging and equipping coaches with the knowledge and skills to support early educators.

While respondents generally liked the idea of moving towards simplified Quality Practices with more flexible ways for early educators to meet Rating requirements, many had questions about the proposed changes as well as how additional flexibility would be implemented, and by whom.

- “Would the goals be identified by coaches, programs, or both?”
- “[We need] explanation of what exactly is wanted for each practice.”
- “How are we to determine what 'quality' is to one culture versus another? If we [want] to be culturally inclusive, we may have to consider what quality looks like.”
- “How do we honor emergent curriculum and responsive curriculum - some programs may have a more child-led approach where they meet the ECIPS through environmental prompts and invitations instead of lesson planning FOR them. How can this be better supported??”

Many respondents acknowledged that quality is a difficult thing to define, as it means different things to different people. As one respondent put it:

- “Quality is a bit of a difficult thing to define, especially in the complex world of child care. There is no singular model for a quality program, and the most important factors—such as compassionate and positive interactions with children and consistency of adults—prove difficult to measure.”

In the revised Quality Practices, a few respondents feel that the proposed distinctions between center-based and family child care programs missed the mark.

As part of this topic, respondents were asked to provide feedback on a revised set of Quality Practices, which included a new differentiation in the language used for center-based versus family child care providers. In the proposed Quality Practices, early educators in center-based programs were referred to as “early educators,” while early educators working in family child care homes were referred to as “family child care providers.” Some respondents shared negative feedback about this distinction in the survey, noting that the separation of Quality

Practices and different terminology used seems to invalidate the importance of the work that early educators working in family child care do.

- “As far as the Parent Aware Quality Practices, for many years we were told that FCC and CCC should be treated the same as far [as] the profession. When you separate the two of them like what is done on the [revised Quality Practices chart] by calling FCCs 'providers' and CCC 'early educators,' you are clearly NOT treating them the same. They are ALL early educators. In wording this the way it is, family child care providers are not seen as the professionals that they are! [They] want to be seen as professionals. In my review, most of the wording that is used in the Quality Practices for Center-based Settings applies, can, and should be used for the Quality Practices for Family Child Care Providers!”
- “Why are Family Child Care Providers not considered "Early Educators" as well? Who decided this? Could it be reconsidered??”

Respondents see coaches as critically important in supporting programs’ quality improvement, but some have concerns about the feasibility of more “intensive coaching.”

Many respondents mentioned the crucial role that coaches play in supporting programs through the Parent Aware Rating process and ongoing quality improvement. Specifically, when asked what they would need to be successful if these changes were made, many called for more ongoing coaching support above and beyond the Rating process.

- “[We need] more people power!! we need more highly trained coaches to actually coach about quality practices vs. coaching for a Rating.”

At the same time, some respondents were concerned about the feasibility of implementing more intensive coaching. Many mentioned specific concerns about burden on early educators (due to the time it takes to participate in coaching), costs, and disruptions caused by outside visitors to programs.

- “[We need] coaches with actual time to get to know programs and help them with short term and long term goals. I worry that isn't realistic.”
- “I'm not sure what it'll look like with ‘extensive coaching’ but it already takes a lot of time!”
- “The only problem I'm seeing is more time will be taken out of teaching to be working with a coach. Or I will have to do that on my own time because there’s no extra time for me outside of classroom and prep to work with someone.”
- “It seems this survey implies providing evidence of what the childcare program does to meet the program requirements is too much work. Having a Coach come in is also work and IT IS EXPENSIVE.”

Regarding broader shifts away from an emphasis on Ratings to instead prioritize quality improvement, some respondents are concerned about making it “too easy” to become Rated.

While many respondents expressed a desire for simplified Rating requirements and processes to reduce burden on early educators, others were concerned about the implications of making the process easier. Some felt that making it easier for programs to become Rated and/or increase their Rating would dilute the meaning of Ratings

and, simultaneously, diminish the accomplishments of programs that worked hard to achieve a Four-Star Rating via the current process.

- “If becoming Parent Aware rated is ‘too easy’ all programs will be able to obtain a 4-star rating, and it won’t really be a “rating system” if everyone is rated.”
- “Rating means it is something that is worked for. It shows that effort was put in for the rating that a provider has. Anyone can be recognized, it doesn't necessarily mean that any work was put into it. Quality practices would show more that what we do as providers is done because we want to do it, not because we have to do it.”
- “Not everyone should be GIVEN a star rating. We have had to earn it. It could become too ambiguous, and we lose quality.”

Some respondents appreciate the intention behind the proposed shift to Quality Recognition Levels but suggest alternate framing to ensure the change is meaningful.

A few respondents shared other ideas for how Parent Aware could shift its focus from Quality Rating to Quality Recognition. Some were concerned that the new term “Quality Recognition Levels” would not meaningfully change perceptions of the system, noting that the word “levels” is in itself an indication of the same hierarchical structure in place with current Ratings. Instead, they suggested adopting terminology used in other state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, such as “steps.” Some also pointed out that the framing of “steps” on a quality improvement journey felt more aligned with the intention of recognizing and supporting quality improvement rather than focusing solely on Ratings.

- “Maybe adding the word “steps” would be effective since it resembles that you [are] continuing your journey and not just stopping at a certain level of quality. Should be called steps rather than levels or stars to make it seem like you are working your way up. Levels seem similar to star ratings.”

Others liked the descriptors included in the new proposed recognition levels (e.g., “maintaining” or “enhancing” quality) but similarly suggested dropping the “recognition levels” language—either because they felt it would be perceived in a similar manner to Ratings, or because they simply thought it was too wordy. A few also pointed out that numbered levels might create confusion because similar terms are used in the K-12 system.

- “3 Providers commented that they like the language of Maintaining, Reflecting, Enhancing, Implementing, [as it] aligns so well with the KCFs. Could this be used instead of or in addition to the ‘Recognition Level’ language... something to consider may be: Level 1: Maintaining, Level 2: Reflecting, Level 3: Enhancing, Level 4: Implementing.”
- “Will this be confused with Level 4 schools in the grade school world?”
- “‘Recognition Level’ is a lot of wording [sic], can we shorten it up so it's fewer words?”

Topic 2: Automatic One-Star Ratings

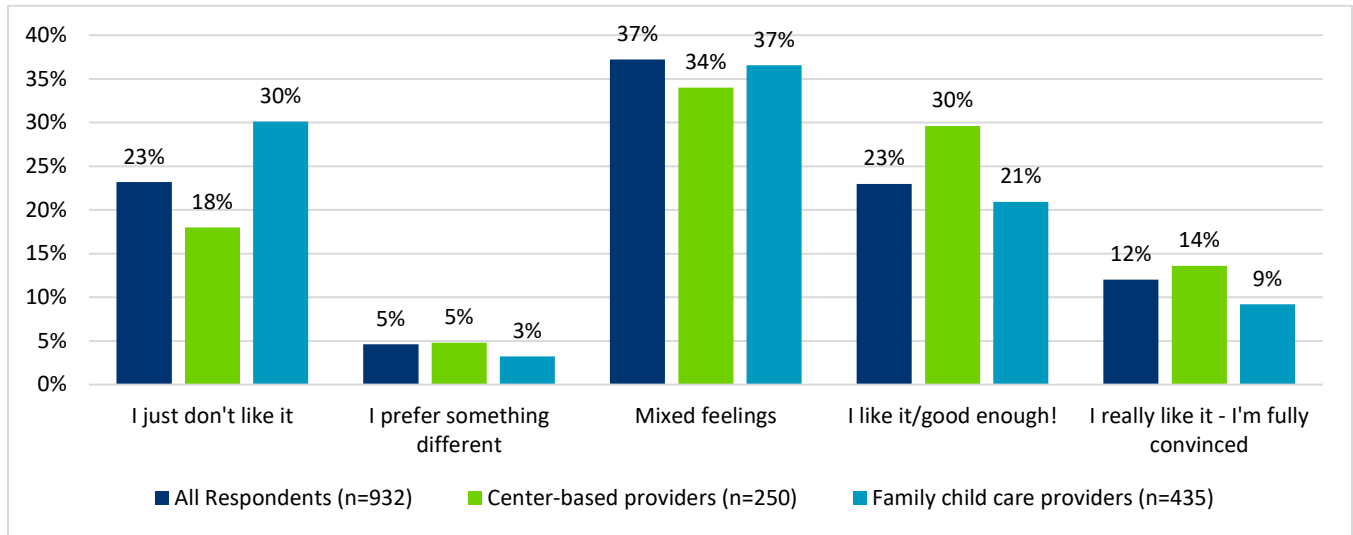
Current	There are indicators licensed child care programs must meet in order to earn a One Star Rating. However, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law that all licensed child care programs will be assigned a One Star Parent Aware Rating, unless they opt out. This change is planned for July 1, 2026.
Problem	More providers are needed to serve children with Early Learning Scholarships, which families may use only in Rated child care and early education programs. In addition, becoming licensed is an achievement in the quality improvement journey. Parent Aware does not currently recognize all child care providers who have achieved this important milestone with a Star Rating.
Proposed Change	Starting July 1, 2026, all licensed child care programs will automatically receive a One Star Rating. The idea is for the current One Star Rating requirements to no longer be required, and for all licensed programs in good standing with licensing to automatically receive a One Star Rating, unless they choose to apply for a higher Star Rating or opt out of being Rated. Programs that wish to opt out of the Automatic One Star Rating would have the option to check a box on a website.

Topic 2 discussion

Overall, respondents have mixed feelings about the upcoming change to Automatic One-Star Ratings, but more family-based early educators and unrated providers have concerns about the change.

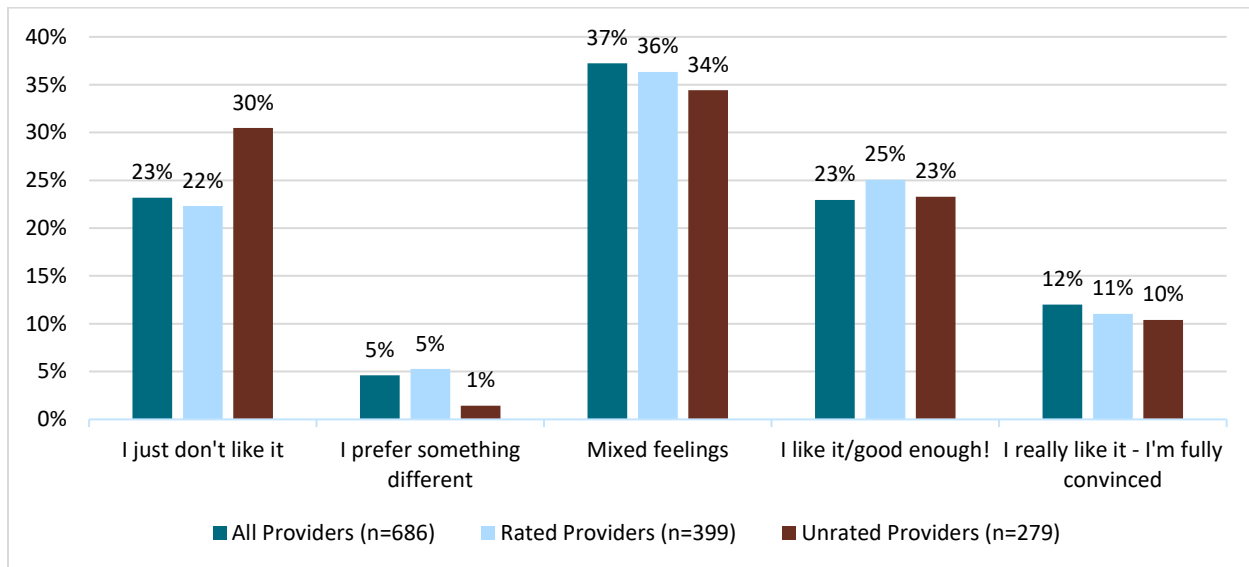
As shown in Figure 9, respondents had somewhat mixed reactions to Automatic One-Star Ratings. Across all groups, respondents most commonly said they had mixed feelings about the change (37%), closely followed by those who liked the change (35%), and those who did not like the change (28%). More family-based early educators were strongly opposed to the change (30% said “I just don’t like it”) than center-based early educators (18%). Further, additional responses with more specific critiques and concerns (discussed below) were overwhelmingly from family-based early educators.

Figure 9. Respondents’ reactions to Automatic One-Star Ratings, by early educator type (n=932)



When responses are broken out by rated and unrated providers, it shows more unrated providers were strongly opposed to the change (30% said “I just don’t like it”), than rated providers (22%). Slightly more rated providers responded that they like the change (36% of rated providers said “I like it/good enough” or “I really like it,” compared to 33% of unrated providers).

Figure 10. Respondents’ reactions to Automatic One-Star Ratings, by rated and unrated (n=932)



Many respondents feel that becoming Parent Aware Rated should be voluntary.

Among those respondents who were most opposed to Automatic One-Star Ratings, many were concerned about shifting from an opt-in system to an opt-out system and the pressure that would put on early educators to become Rated. This sentiment was particularly prevalent among family-based early educators, many of whom

expressed that becoming Rated is not something early educators should be “volun-told” to do if it doesn’t align with their personal goals and values.

- “You need providers to want to be in the program not forced to be.”
- “I am frustrated that the program that is supposed to be a choice, is being forced on providers that prefer not to participate.”
- “Forced compliance with programs that our cultures may not align with is contradictory to what Parent Aware says they stand for.”

Other respondents are against Automatic One-Star Ratings because they feel programs should have to earn a Rating rather than be given one.

In explaining their reactions, many respondents—and particularly family-based early educators—shared a feeling that giving out One-Star Ratings to any programs in good standing with licensing would make it “too easy” to earn a Rating. Many see this as unfair to those programs that earned their Rating via the current process and some think that too many One-Star Rated programs will dilute the value of Ratings.

- “This isn't fair for those who have worked for their rating.”
- “You should have to earn the star rating. We were told we would not be able to accept early learning scholarship if we didn’t do it. The ones that did the work are being slapped in the face for doing the work, while the rest can sit and wait and be given it for free.”
- “Making it mandatory negates those who put in work to EARN a one star, and it also forces people who don't want it into [becoming Rated].”
- “As a new center that just went through licensing, it is a lot of work, but your license is what you earn. The [Automatic One-Star Rating] is an example of ‘everyone gets a ribbon,’ and I think it would devalue the status [of Parent Aware Ratings].”
- “If every center is one star rated, it loses the value of what a rating means.”
- “Well for starters, I would need for not EVERY LICENSED PROVIDER IN GOOD STANDING TO BE A ONE STAR!!!!!! Being star rated is extra time and effort into receiving their rating. It is quite the kick in the face to know that every license holder in good standing is going to be awarded a one star when it is supposed to be an optional, an extra to add to our 'resume.’”

Some worry that Automatic One-Star Ratings might stigmatize early educators, as families may view a One-Star Rating more negatively than they would no Rating at all.

Many respondents also mentioned concerns about how families will interpret Ratings following the Automatic One-Star rollout. Many pointed out that other commonly used star-based rating systems, such as Google or Yelp reviews, operate differently from Parent Aware. Because of this, some worried that families may perceive a One-Star Rated program as not meeting basic expectations or being lower than average quality—much as they might interpret a one-star rating for a restaurant or hotel. Some even speculated that families might see a One-Star Rated program as lower quality than a program with no Rating.

- “If u had to pick a restaurant to eat, would u go to a 1 star or 4 star? Just because I don't participate in Parent Aware doesn't make my program bad, but rating me 1 star would make it appear that way.”
- “I wouldn't want to be only a 1 star program. Being unrated would be better.”
- “Providers that don't have interest or time to go through [the] rating process being stuck at a one star and the negative assumptions that [their program is] less than others.”

Some respondents felt that Automatic One-Star Ratings will essentially strongarm early educators into seeking higher Ratings to avoid potential stigma. As these respondents put it:

- “[O]ne star ratings indicate a lack of quality to the general public. It's embarrassing. It's labeling with a scarlet letter.”
- “It appears to be a hidden way to increase the amount of providers participating in the ratings. Not enough providers bought into [Parent Aware], so now they (providers) will be forced to be embarrassed by a 1-star rating or reluctantly work towards more stars just to avoid the appearance of a lower quality program.”

For this topic, we examined the open-ended responses by respondent characteristics and found that more than 80 percent of the responses sharing concerns about stigma or family perceptions were from family-based early educators.

Five-Star Rating idea

To address concerns about Automatic One-Star Ratings, some respondents suggested shifting to a Five-Star Rating system. Some feel that increasing the upper bounds of Ratings would help address equity concerns specifically for programs that became One-Star Rated through the current process. In this model, only unrated programs could be Rated at a One-Star level, programs that were One-Star Rated through the current process would be elevated to Two-Stars, and so on. In addition to addressing common concerns about fairness for currently Rated programs, some argued that this change would also help align Parent Aware with other commonly used star rating systems that families and members of the public at large are more familiar with. For example:

- “This is absolutely ridiculous. Basically, you're saying everyone is equal as a childcare provider just because they have a license. If there is a need to automatically give out a 1 star rating, then the scale should be based on 5 stars, with the 2 star rating being equivalent to the previous 1 star, and a 5 star rating equivalent to what was previously a 4 star rating.”
- “Add a 5th star, and move the stars up. It does a huge disservice to all those who have put in the work to become rated.”
- “Have the requirements expanded a little. Maybe go up to 5 star. All providers qualify for 1.”

Of those respondents who advocated for a shift to a Five-Star scale, around half were family-based early educators and half were center-based early educators.

Even with a shift to a Five-Star scale, however, some respondents felt that it would still not be possible for people, particularly families, perceiving a One-Star Rating as negative.

- “If everyone licensed is a 1, then have the scale go to 5. Also, every rating scale out there—from restaurants [and] movies [to] used cars—has a star rating that goes to 5. [This] makes 4 stars look like [programs] are one star shy of where they should be.”
- “The scale is off with this approach. Star rating systems (e.g. Google reviews, Trip Advisor, etc.) are 0-5 stars. 3 stars means average, adequate, or good enough. Anything less than 3 stars suggests low quality. I think Parent Aware might not be successful in trying to get people to think that 1 star means acceptable.”

How families understand Ratings: Insight from focus groups

As part of another component of the Parent Aware Evaluation, Child Trends conducted focus groups with families across Minnesota to learn about their experiences finding and accessing CCEE for a child aged five or younger. Because the timing of those focus groups coincided with the department’s efforts to gather feedback on proposed changes to Parent Aware, Child Trends asked families about a select number of proposed changes most relevant to families’ interactions with Parent Aware. Insights from those focus groups are provided below.

When asked about their understanding of a One- vs. Four-Star program in focus groups, **many families saw a higher Star Rating as an indication that programs offer more enriching activities and structure** to support children’s learning and school readiness. One family shared:

- “To me, a one-star rating is probably those centers that are more ‘we’re gonna be fun-based [or] play-based’ versus ‘we’re gonna be more educational, and we’re expecting them to learn their numbers and shapes and [etc.]’ [I feel like] programs that don’t have as much structure are gonna be the lower stars.”

In explaining how they think about Ratings, **many families made comparisons to how they would think about reviews for other types of businesses like hotels or restaurants.** As one participant described:

- “Star ratings can be kind of confusing because I think oftentimes people think of star ratings as satisfaction instead of like hotel ratings. It is about what amenities they offer. A 1 Star Hotel isn’t necessarily a worse hotel than a 5 star. It’s just a 5 star offers a whole lot more. I think [it is the] same with Parent Aware. [Two Stars] doesn’t mean she’s a bad provider. It just means she maybe doesn’t [have] all the bells and whistles that a four-star center might have.”

Some families felt that **One-Star signified not meeting basic expectations.** This perception may be related to the fact that some **incorrectly assumed that reviews from families factor into programs’ Ratings:**

- “In my head, I would say one star probably is below expectations. That two to three [star] area probably meets or slightly exceeds expectations. 4 stars would exceed expectations.”
- “No stars might just be OK. [If] they’re newer, maybe no one’s got around to giving them a review. If [a program has] one star, it’s like OK, there was probably something that upset the individual enough to go online [and] give the one star. I’d almost look at one star as being more hurtful than no stars, if that makes sense.”

Others had a different view of One-Star Ratings, thinking a One-Star program may not go above and beyond but likely still meets basic expectations. To them, **any Star Rating level demonstrates a commitment to education:**

“Even if it's just a one star rating, it's showing that the provider is going, not ‘above and beyond,’ but taking their position and role in educational development seriously. They want to know as much as they can to offer children more education, different types of care, or cultural sensitivity. I know that providers also get the incentive of grants to be able to enhance their program. So, it's not [that] they're just doing [child care] because they want to stay home – they're taking it seriously and want to invest in the future of children.

Topic 3: Aligning Rating requirements and monitoring processes for child care, Pre-K and Head Start

<p>Current</p>	<p>Parent Aware has different Rating Pathways for different program types, with some program types being required to document their quality for more indicators than other program types because each program type has different requirements in law. For example, because center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs are monitored by the Office of Head Start and have to adhere to federal Head Start Program Performance Standards, they can automatically receive a Four-Star Rating by way of an application that is built into existing annual monitoring processes in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education. No alignment chart of requirements across program types is published.</p>
<p>Problem</p>	<p>There is misunderstanding about the alignment between program types, with some program types feeling like they are required to do more to demonstrate their quality</p>
<p>Proposed Change</p>	<p>Publish an alignment chart that shows the processes and requirements for each program type, Head Start, school-based Pre-K, and accredited programs. The alignment chart would show how the requirements of each of the monitoring entities (e.g., the U.S. Office of Head Start for Head Start programs) would be leveraged to demonstrate quality for participation in Parent Aware. You can see the draft alignment chart here (Quality Processes and Standards: Alignment Chart Draft).</p>

Topic 3 discussion

Most respondents feel an alignment chart would be helpful to clarify misunderstandings about the Rating process and strengthen early educators’ trust in the Rating process.

In the survey, many respondents liked the idea of creating an alignment chart to help explain the Rating process for different types of programs. Some noted the chart would help create transparency and build early educators’ trust that the Rating process is fair and equitable.

- “I think it would be extremely helpful [to have this available] for providers who may be confused or concerned about the work other program types are putting in. I also think it would be greatly beneficial for all system staff to have a copy of this. Many system staff, including Recruiters, are still confused on the different pathway requirements, eligibility, and benefits they can receive.”
- “Yes, this would add transparency [and] could build a program's trust in the [Rating] process.”
- “I appreciate the explanation of why rating requirements differ.”

Some respondents like the idea of an alignment chart but thought the current draft was too confusing and text heavy, while others have questions about its intended audience.

Though most survey respondents felt an alignment chart would be helpful in theory, some thought that the current draft fell short in terms of clarity and accessibility. Many noted that the current organization combined with the quantity of text made it difficult to make sense of the chart.

- “It seems confusing. It would be better to [make it] more user friendly or more clear cut.”
- “The alignment chart (draft) is very difficult to discern at first read through.”
- “That is a LOT of information to plow through. This might be good as a technical background document, but it won't be accessible for the field.”

Others were unclear on the intended audience of the chart and flagged that because of the heavy use of industry-specific and technical terminology, families in particular may struggle to make use of the information.

- “The chart has a LOT of jargon and very specific industry terms. I think it would be helpful to have a more general chart for parents/the public to help them understand what it means to be a Head Start program or Parent Aware Rated or anything else.”
- “I don't think this chart would be meaningful for families. It is too full of jargon and too wordy. I strongly believe a family would think ‘non-accredited’ means ‘not licensed.’”
- “Are parents actually going to look at that when looking at daycares/preschools?”

In lieu of commenting on the alignment chart, some respondents expressed broader concerns about perceived inequities in Rating processes, particularly for family-based early educators.

In their responses, many respondents shared broader critiques of the fact that Parent Aware offers different Rating processes for different types of programs, which some see as unfair and inequitable. Many perceived that family-based early educators in particular have to do more to “prove” they are high quality than other types of CCEE programs, and especially Head Start, school-based Pre-K, and accredited programs that are eligible for a Four-Star Rating through the Automatic or Accelerated Rating Pathways.

- “[An alignment chart] doesn't change the fact that not everyone is held to the same standard. They already get funding and extra funding with being rated without doing all of the same work that CCC have to do. A school could “flunk” and they would still get their rating. A CCC doesn't pass and they lose everything. It is not equitable at all.”

- “Home providers will still have to ‘prove themselves’ and not get that automatic rating that centers, head start and school-based programs seem to be just given. Home providers do a ton of work, why are we not given that same opportunity to get a 4 ‘star’ rating with our licensing?”
- “Nope. The hoops are not the same. FCCs are often frustrated as they have to do everything, [whereas] an administrator, staff etc. do the work for head start, accredited [programs], etc. Nothing can be ‘the same.’”

Because of these concerns, some argued that the priority should not be to clarify the differences in Rating processes by program type, but instead to assess whether processes are equitable and adjust them as needed.

- “I don't think that ‘misunderstanding’ is the key issue. I think providers are more concerned with inequality and the fact that certain settings do in fact have to do more to earn the same rating.”

Topic 4: Supporting programs to provide quality learning environments that are culturally, linguistically and ability affirming

Current	Child care programs may earn points towards a Three- or Four-Star Rating by conducting self-assessments of their learning environment and cultural responsiveness and then set goals based on the results
Problem	Many programs have been in Parent Aware a long time and have already used the self-assessment tools offered (the Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Competency Self-Assessment or the Family and Community Engagement Tool [FaCET]).
Proposed Change	With more assessment tools to choose from and more support to gather feedback from families, programs could learn more about their program on a variety of topics and develop more customized goals to improve their learning environment. For example, Parent Aware could offer a mix of observation tools (which would be conducted on-site by an observer) and self-assessment tools (which would be completed by the provider) that programs could choose from. Providers would work with a coach to complete and review results, co-create goals for improvement, and get connected to additional mentorship, consultation, referrals, and/or training. Program Ratings would not be impacted by their scores on these observations or self-assessments. Below is a table of possible observation tools and self-assessment tools, including details about what kind of information each collects (see Appendix I of this report).

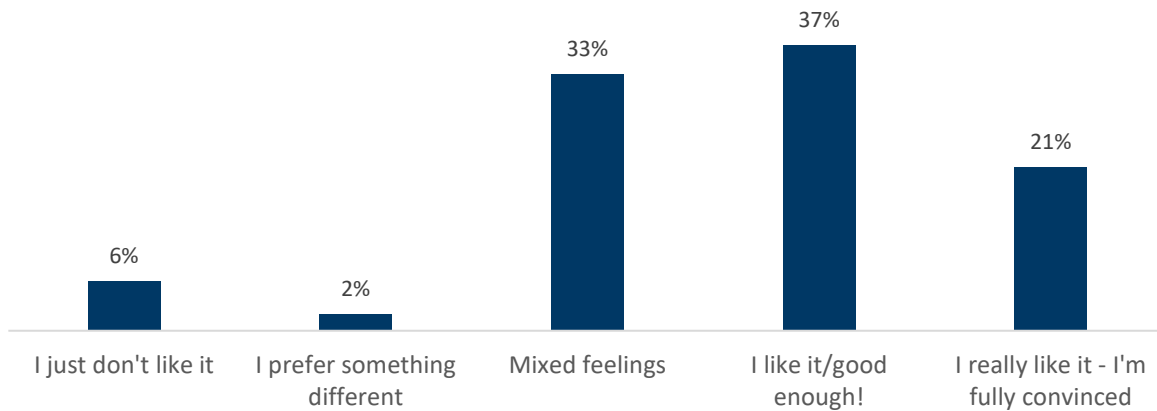
Topic 4 discussion

More respondents like the idea of expanding the list of tools available to programs than those who think there were too many choices.

As shown in Figure 11, more than half of respondents (58%) were in favor of the idea of expanding the list of self-assessment and observation tools early educators can use to ensure they are providing a culturally,

linguistically, and ability affirming learning environment. A third of all respondents had mixed feelings about the idea (33%), and very few disliked the idea (8%) (see Appendix I of this report for the list of ideas for additional self-assessments and observation tools).

Figure 11. Respondents’ reactions to the idea of having more observation and self-assessment tools to support culturally responsive practices (n=514)



Many respondents were especially in favor of expanding the list of tools, noting that more options would allow programs to choose a tool that best suits their needs. In particular, many felt that the additional options would benefit more early educators across settings (e.g., family child care) as well as those with varying caregiving philosophies, professional development needs, and quality improvement goals.

- “I like the range of assessments available. It seems like they cover a broader range of cultures/educational settings in which centers might have better luck finding an assessment that is more suitable to them.”
- “[I like the] flexibility in using what [tools] work well for our homes and programs, not just getting knocked down to a three [star rating] because, for example with the FCCERS, we aren't willing to put a sand table in the house.”
- “As a nature-based program I am thrilled to see that a relevant tool (Nature-based Early Childhood Program Assessment & Guidebook) is included in this list. This is exactly the kind of tool that would be meaningful to use in my program. I hope that it continues to be included in the final list.”

A few respondents mentioned that the expanded list of tools might be especially valuable for early educators who have been through the Parent Aware Rating process multiple times and therefore may have already used and learned what they needed to learn from the tools currently available to programs.

- “I like the different options. When you have been a provider for so many years, you have the basics, and the current assessments don't really identify valuable ways to improve my program.”
- “I do like them all, and being a director who has gone through Parent Aware twice, I love having options. I feel that it helps us to work on different areas of our program and really dig in to them deeper.”

While less common, some respondents expressed that the proposed changes included too many choices for early educators. Some felt this would add unnecessary complexity to an already complicated process, which could increase the burden on early educators and also lead to confusion or overwhelm.

- “Keeping the number of choices reasonable would be good as well, so folks don't overwhelmed by now having to learn about 10+ tools and what would be best for them.”
- “I am a busy family child care provider. I like direct information on what is needed. I do not have time to assess which tool is best for me and then the time to do them. I want clear step by step choices.”
- “I appreciate the differentiation, but it seems wide. Like, too many options. If the goal is to establish a shared set of values for quality with different modes of delivery, I think ongoing self-assessment using a similar tool across program types would be best.”

Some pointed out that coaches and other support staff would need extensive training on the expanded list of tools to be able to help early educators choose a tool and use the data for quality improvement.

Even among those respondents who were in favor of expanding the list of observation and self-assessment tools available to programs, many raised concerns related to the feasibility of implementing this change. In particular, some pointed out that coaches and other support staff (e.g., professional development advisors) would need a great deal of training on the new tools to be able to effectively support early educators in choosing the tool that's right for them, administering the tool, and using the data to inform quality improvements. Others pointed out that this training would not only require time, but also potentially funding.

- “[We need] time to get Quality Coaches trained and familiarized on each self-assessment and/or observation tool. [We also need] STAFF! MN DHS needs to assess the capacity it will take to have the implementation of this be successful. Assess the staffing at partnering agencies that provide these coaching/mentorship/assessment opportunities and create new jobs/hire more people. There needs to be staff available within a reasonable amount of time to come in and provide observations, consultations, mentorship, and referrals.”
- “Coaches and maybe PDAs would need a lot of training on how to appropriately use each tool. This could be an overwhelming task though.”
- “I like the idea - but as a Coach, I would want to ensure you will be providing us with ample training before being asked to implement these tools in the field.”
- “It needs to be simplified. We [providers] put in so many hours already. I will no longer spend weeks working on evidence for Parent Aware. My time is precious.”
- “Funding. Professional development is costly both in time and money.”

Regarding barriers and unintended consequences, some respondents feel this change could actively discourage early educators who don't want to be observed from participating in Parent Aware or seeking a higher Rating.

Many respondents cautioned that some early educators are strongly opposed to being observed as part of the Rating process. Some early educators expressed that having an outside person visit their program can be very disruptive, both in the stress it creates for staff and in its impact on children's attention. While some felt that the

proposed change of having observation scores not impact programs’ Ratings might help appease that stress, others felt that the addition of on-site observations alone might nonetheless deter some unrated early educators from participating or discourage currently Rated early educators from seeking a higher Star level.

- “I like the idea of more assessment tools, and the chance to learn more about them. However, as I stated before, to have a coach or an accessor [sic] come in causes stress, interruption to the teaching environment, and many children have a hard time with someone new coming into the room. It raises the stress level for the teachers and may cause some to leave the profession. In my opinion it would be much better to do self-assessments or group staff development and then have the Director do the observing or coaching to have less intrusive observations.”
- “This is going to probably take more time out of my day or they will expect us to have someone do this while we are trying to care for children. This just puts more stress on us.”

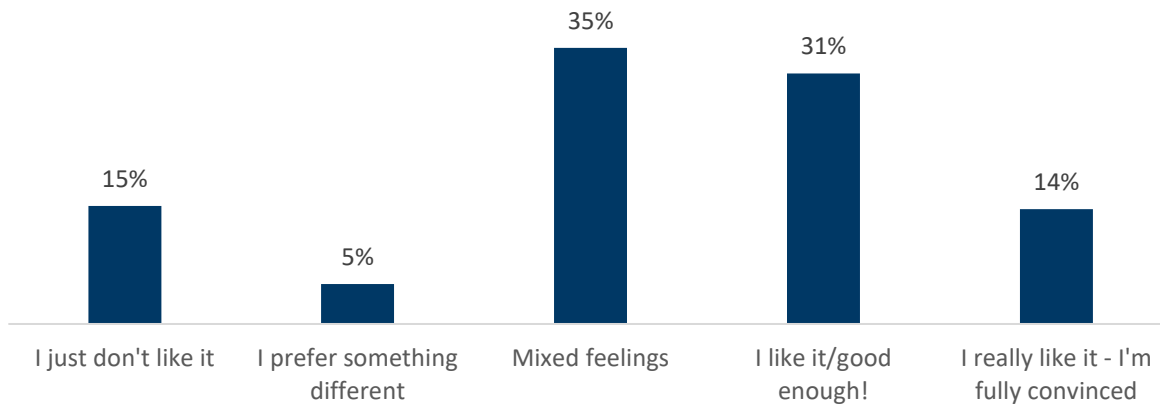
Topic 5: Supporting early educators to engage in ongoing family communication

Current	Programs earn points toward indicators for having family communication and engagement activities. Using a family survey is one option for family communication.
Problem	There is not a way to ensure families can provide anonymous feedback to child care and early education programs. In addition, Parent Aware does not have an indicator related to culturally affirming activities.
Proposed Change	Parent Aware could support child care programs to offer family surveys in order to receive feedback on how well their family communication and engagement activities are working and gather information about how well their activities reflect children’s lives, abilities, and cultures. Providers’ ratings would not be impacted by the results of the family survey

Topic 5 discussion

As shown in Figure 12, when asked about proposed changes to support programs in gathering feedback about how well their family communication and engagement practices are working for their families, most respondents liked the ideas (45%) or had mixed feelings (35%).

Figure 12. Respondents’ reactions to ideas to support programs’ family engagement and communication (n=501)



Many respondents like the idea of getting support from Parent Aware to collect more and better feedback from the families they serve.

Among those who were in favor of this proposed change, many respondents felt it would be valuable to have support from Parent Aware related to how they gather feedback from families. Some early educators who responded to the survey noted that they already regularly survey their families or gather feedback through other ways, but that they would benefit from more ideas or tools to improve those existing processes. Respondents also generally liked the idea of early educators working through family survey results with a coach to inform their quality improvement plans, without having the pressure of results impacting programs’ Ratings.

- “We do provide surveys for our families so that we can receive feedback. I would love to have further ideas for surveys.”
- “Like that ratings would not be impacted by the results but rather as a way for providers to improve their services to families. Coaches could review this feedback with them and help them address concerns.”
- “I think it is good to get feedback from families. It allows them to voice things that they might want in their program.”

When asked about potential barriers and what supports they might need, many pointed out that early educators may face hurdles getting their families to participate in surveys.

As mentioned above, some early educators who responded to the survey shared that their programs already periodically gather feedback from the families they serve via surveys and other methods. Some of those early educators also mentioned, however, that getting families to participate in those efforts has been a significant challenge in the past. As such, some respondents advocated for Parent Aware supporting programs not only in crafting effective family surveys, but also in strategies to support family participation—particularly for families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and/or those with limited access to technology.

- “We have tried surveys in the past and do not receive a whole lot of feedback - even when offering gift cards as an incentive.”
- “We know that surveys do not reach all families, especially our non-white families. What if we supported community and family feedback that was led by families and community members and designed by them to support their cultures and priorities?”
- “I would still be able to participate, but my center is in need of another way to do surveys. such as giving me a QR code or link and pulling it up for my families. I would also need it in Somalian and other languages for them to understand.”
- “Ensure the survey is compatible with the ways that different programs provide information to parents - email, newsletters, ProCare messages, text message.”

Other respondents were confused about the proposed change (or thought others would be confused or skeptical), with some believing that Parent Aware would have access to data from family surveys or that the data might impact their Ratings.

Respondents shared that Parent Aware being involved in direct communications with families they serve is an overreach (though, they may have misinterpreted the proposed change):

- “This would make me angry. Nobody should have a right to survey my families about my program but me.”
- “Getting into my business and my families lives to collect data - for what purpose? These are my clients. Communication belongs to families and myself, not the state. [This is] overreach.”
- “I don't need anyone else involved in my relationships with families! The fact that licensing sends out random questionnaires feels invasive already. I don't need anonymous responses to a survey to guide my approach. I have a very open relationship with all of my families and clear communication. Ick. I just really hate this idea.”

In the same vein of people assuming Parent Aware would get access to the data, some also expressed concerns about families being overly negative and that this could impact their Ratings (which again, is not what was suggested):

- “There are parents that always complain....about everything....no matter how fantastic a program is.....they always have something negative to say.....this is a huge problem area for this proposed idea for change because you would be receiving negative feedback.”
- “Plus it would allow the family who was terminated from care to taint the results as they often do out of spite. Nope. Bad idea.”

Some respondents even correctly anticipated that early educators might interpret this proposed change to mean that Parent Aware would be involved in gathering and reviewing family feedback:

- “Some providers might feel that PA would see the results, and I know that won't be the case.”
- “I think there would be MANY educators who would see this as invasive and not be receptive to the idea, even with the caveat that their ratings would not be impacted.”

While most respondents see value in gathering feedback from families, some don't think anonymous surveys are the best mechanism.

Some respondents liked the idea of gathering feedback from families (or already do so) but had concerns about whether an anonymous survey is the best way to hear from families. Many early educators said they prefer to build trusting relationships and establish open channels of communication such that families feel comfortable bringing ideas or concerns to them directly. Further, in line with concerns about whether families would participate (discussed above), some respondents cautioned of "survey fatigue" as well as potential duplication with other channels for collecting feedback.

- "Too much survey fatigue without real conversations between teachers and parents. It is through face-face dialogue that real change happens."
- "Child care settings are not typical business environments. Relationships are built through deep connection between children, families, and child care providers. An anonymous survey can harm trust, relationships, and well-being. Instead, Parent Aware should focus on other methods of open, building, and uplifting forms of feedback."
- "Our parents are being communicated with on a daily basis. They also receive surveys already. Over the years the paperwork has been repetitive and you want to add more?"

Other respondents worried that pushing anonymous surveys could have unintended consequences. Some anticipate that families will use an anonymous survey primarily to share negative feedback, which may in turn lead to early educators feeling additional stress or burnout. In small programs, such as family child care, some were concerned that family feedback might not truly be anonymous in that their early educator might be able to identify them just based on their answers alone. This dynamic could create tension between early educators and families, thereby undermining the purpose of the survey.

- I think it would put a lot of stress on directors and teachers to receive lots of anonymous feedback. We want to work with families to resolve issues, but I could quickly see families using this system as a way to air grievances.
- "Negative feedback - especially for things out of a provider's control - may add to stress, burnout, and loss of workforce in the early childhood field."
- "Family child care providers almost always [know] who completes anonymous surveys because they often only serve 6-8 families at a time and it's easy to guess based off of their responses."
- "I am not sure this is helpful. You [providers] are responsible for knowing your people: your staff, children and families. If families have to hide behind a survey [for] feedback... all you are going to get is negative."

Not all respondents felt that an anonymous survey would be problematic, however. In fact, some felt anonymity might make families feel more comfortable sharing feedback with their program. As one respondent put it:

- "Anonymous feedback is necessary for parents to feel secure in their child's enrollment in the school. It's my opinion that a parent feels a lot of pressure to support the school and does not want to rock the boat, because the school holds a lot of power in deciding whether their child stays enrolled or not."

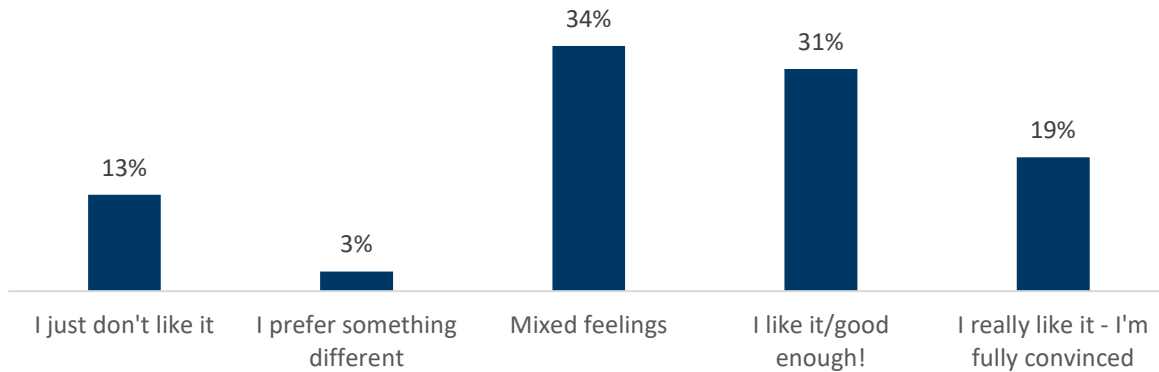
Topic 6: Expanding observations and coaching on child-adult interactions in all settings, but without being scored for Ratings

Current	Licensed, non-accredited child care centers with preschool classrooms seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating must be observed and achieve a minimum score on the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System or “CLASS,” an observation tool designed to assess the quality of adult-child interactions. Early educators may receive CLASS coaching to help them meet the CLASS scores required.
Problem	Because a minimum score is required, observations are stressful and high stakes for early educators working in center-based settings. Family child care providers are not observed, are not offered CLASS coaching, and wonder how the Star Rating could be accurate without an onsite visit.
Proposed Change	<p>Adult-child interactions are observed for all programs using one or more adult-child interaction observation tools. Programs would be provided data about adult-child interactions at their program and work with a coach to co-create goals for improvement. With this new approach, there would be no minimum scores programs would have to meet to earn a certain Rating. Rather, programs would get credit toward their Rating simply for being observed and for setting improvement goals based on the results in collaboration with a coach. A variety of different adult-child observation tools could be offered, including the CLASS, the Child Home Early Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO), and the CHILD observation.</p> <p>See the table below for more information.</p>

Topic 6 discussion

As shown in Figure 13, half of all respondents were in favor of expanding observations and coaching on adult-child interactions as well as the proposed idea of not using the scores from observations to be factored into programs’ Ratings.

Figure 13. Respondents’ reactions to the idea of expanded observations and coaching on adult-child interactions, but without being scored for Ratings (n=439)



Child care center early educators are overwhelmingly in favor of removing minimum observation score requirements from the Rating process and instead using scores to inform early educators’ quality improvement goals and work with a coach.

In the survey, most respondents, and particularly child care center early educators, were excited about the proposed change to remove minimum score requirements for observations. They explained that the way observations are currently used within the Rating process can create a great deal of stress, as many early educators are acutely aware that their observation scores might impact the entire program’s Rating for the next two years. Using scores from an observation conducted at a single point in time can also contribute to early educators’ stress, with some feeling that “one bad day” could make or break their program’s rating.

- “I feel this would be a good change. It is extremely stressful for the teachers to go through the observation knowing that if kids are having a bad day or something is off that day, it could cost the program their 4 Star rating based on just a 2-hour observation.”
- “This is great - my staff would feel so much better if the goal really was improvement and quality rather than hitting a certain minimum score.”
- “Relief! The current minimum scoring system is stressful.”
- “Love this idea. All should be assessed in some way, and [I] love the idea of it not being high stakes and more of a tool for improvement. [I] have always felt sorry for the poor preschool teacher that the entire center’s rating [depends] on them. [It is] definitely not equitable at all.”
- “I really like this! Probably my favorite Topic so far. ... Being observed to get helpful strategies in the classroom is great!”

A few respondents shared that decoupling observation scores from Ratings and instead using them as a tool for quality improvement seemed more in line with Parent Aware’s purpose and philosophy. Others speculated that the change may even encourage more programs to participate or seek a higher Star Rating.

- “Yes, receiving observation and mentorship is really important! I'm glad that observation piece is maintained and will be available for all program types (and ages?). I agree that the current model is too

high stakes. The point of the feedback is to improve the educators skills and to ensure that children's needs are being met.”

- “I think receiving the benefits of CLASS coaching while not having the pressure of scores impacting a school's rating would be helpful and supportive to early childhood educators.”
- “I like not having it tied to the rating/level. Any way to make this process less stressful for providers is good. More folks may do it then.”

Family-based early educators are concerned about expanding observations into all settings.

Among family-based early educators, who notably are not required to be observed as part of the current Rating process, many expressed concerns about the proposal to begin conducting observations in all program types. Many noted that having outside visitors in their homes can disrupt children’s routines, and that children often get excited or “act out” when a new person is sharing their space. Others pointed out that unlike centers, family child care programs do not have staff or administrative support, meaning early educators are constantly balancing the responsibility to care for children with managing their business operations, finances, and regulatory compliance. Some felt that requiring observations in all programs would lead to yet another thing for family-based early educators to manage, which could cause undue stress or even lead some early educators to no longer participate in Parent Aware.

- “I don't think any of you understand the stress and disruption visitors cause! Kids act up, we are thrown out of routine, and it's extremely stressful. If home visits are required, I would no longer participate.”
- “I am not a school, or a center, I am a mom, teacher, nurse, custodian, cook, cleaner, social worker and small business manager all in one. Hard to manage anything else on top of that.”
- “Kids act up when other people are in the house and if the person isn't interacting with the kids it would not work. It is hard to stay on task with little ones and having someone here would not work for me.”

Even with an expanded list of observation tools, some think the options may not work well for all programs (e.g., Montessori programs).

In line with prior feedback from early educators that in part informed this proposed change, some respondents had concerns about the kinds of observation tools used within the Rating process, and specifically whether those tools were relevant and meaningful for different types of programs.

- “I'm concerned that these assessment tools squeeze child care programs into boxes that don't fit them just right.”
- “CLASS is a beautiful concept, however, I feel like it isn't fully supportive of ALL program types. CLASS doesn't fit in great with Reggio, Montessori, or Nature based programs because most of them are more child [led] and require a certain allotment of time for children to figure things out on their own before a teacher steps in.”

Even with the proposed changes to expand the observation tools available to programs, some respondents felt that more significant changes to the Rating process are needed. For example, some respondents argued that the only way to truly ensure that the Rating process is equitable and supports programs’ unique needs would be to create wholly separate Rating processes for each type of program.

- “School based/Head start, centers and family child care should be in separate rating programs. We are not all the same and should be recognized and celebrated for that. It gives families the best opportunity to find a program that best fits their needs. Families need to have options, and there are 3 distinctly different types of programs.”
- “Why are family daycare providers being lumped into the same rating system, etc. that group centers are in? Makes absolutely zero sense.”

For this change to be successful, many respondents emphasized the need for training to ensure programs and coaches understand the different observation tools and how to use scores.

In line with respondents’ feedback for topic 4, which similarly included a proposal to expand the list of tools available to programs, respondents emphasized the need for coaches and early educators to be trained on any new observation tools so they are equipped to use them effectively. Also in line with feedback on topic 4, some raised concerns about time and capacity—particularly for coaches.

- “Preschool teachers should also have to attend CLASS overview trainings and CLASS trainings should be embedded into the rating system/mandatory training for center staff, so that teaching and learning about the CLASS is ongoing and not just to achieve a rating.”
- “I am familiar with CLASS, but open to learning more (provided we are giving time, training, and support to implement new-to-us tools.)”
- “Again, [we need] sooo much support for coaches and maybe more coaches need to be hired to cover this much more work.”

Topic 7: Supporting early educators’ and administrators’ growth through customized training

Current	Programs participating in Parent Aware earn points toward their desired Rating when early educators and administrators have degrees, credentials, training, and other types of professional development. All family child care providers and lead teachers in centers are required to complete a certain number of training hours within the past five years in five Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) content areas. To earn a Three- or Four-Star Rating, for example, lead teachers must earn a total of 50 training hours in the past five years, with 10 hours in each of five KCF areas. (Read more about Parent Aware’s current training requirements here .)
Problem	Child care centers experience barriers to finding and retaining staff with degrees and training. Family child care providers and early educators experience barriers obtaining degrees, credentials, and completing training hours required by Parent Aware, especially related to cost and lack of time (i.e., a center teacher may be hired shortly before the Parent Aware Rating application is due and there isn’t enough time for the teacher to complete all the required trainings before the application deadline).
Proposed Change	Shift the emphasis to supporting early educators and administrators with customized professional development plans to help them meet professional goals for themselves and for their programs that are set in collaboration with a professional development advisor and a coach. Early educators working in Parent Aware programs could meet

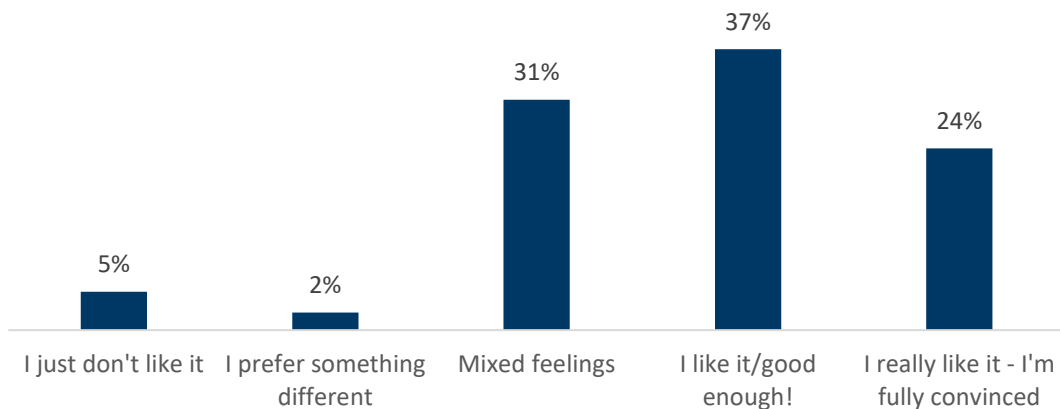
requirements for professional development and training by having or completing a higher education degree, having a teaching license, OR completing 10 hours of training per year in an expanded number of KCF areas. Early educators would work with a professional development advisor to develop a professional development plan that includes plans to work toward a higher education degree, credential, or on-going training hours as well as to receive any additional support needed from a coach, mentor, or other resources. Hours spent with a coach or mentor would also count as training hours.

Topic 7 discussion

The majority of respondents are in favor of moving toward more flexible professional development requirements that can be customized to early educators’ needs.

As shown in Figure 14, around two-thirds of respondents were generally in support of the proposed changes to Parent Aware’s professional development requirements and approach to support early educators’ professional growth. Around a third had mixed feelings (31%), and very few did not like the proposed changes (7%).

Figure 14. Respondents’ reactions to ideas for supporting early educators' and administrators' growth through customized training (n=507)



When asked to explain their opinion, most respondents mentioned liking the added flexibility for early educators to choose trainings and other professional development activities based on their unique needs.

- “Seems a lot more flexible and accommodating to the staff and situation of centers. Staff turnover is high and this will account for that and help each teacher to get what they need.”
- “I really like the more direct specific trainings to help teachers succeed and learn.”
- “Everyone liked the idea of having to take less training if you have a GED/HS degree or above, such as only 10 hours vs. 50 hours. Most also felt it seems like a good idea to allow educators without a high

school degree, to have the option of taking more training hours (such as 50) to obtain the PA rating they want.”

Even with the proposed revision to requirements, time and cost remain significant barriers to early educators’ ability to meet training and/or educational requirements.

As with the other topics, respondents frequently brought up time and cost as potential barriers. Even with the additional flexibilities afforded in the proposed changes, respondents emphasized that early educators work long hours and juggle various responsibilities, including the needs of their own families. Because of this, many early educators will struggle to find time for training hours no matter what. Further, although early educators can meet requirements by earning certain degrees or credentials, many pointed out that higher education and credentialing are cost prohibitive on an early educator’s salary. Other respondents mentioned that even trainings can be costly and put financial strain on early educators, with some suggesting that up-front reimbursements for any costs associated with training would help reduce barriers.

- “I can see a lot of providers having trouble finding the time to complete the training (long days, especially for Family child care). And it is costly to pay for higher education.”
- “A HUGE problem with providers is that we just don’t have time!!! We work 11-hour days, clean, prep and start all over again just to keep up with licensing rules. Weekends are spent shopping, food prepping and TRYING to actually spend time with our own families.”
- “A faster reimbursement for training or a set aside funds, up front, to cover the costs. Waiting on money is frustrating. The turn around window should be quick.”

Others brought up time as a barrier in the context of the time early educators, coaches, and others within the Parent Aware system would need to become familiar with the new requirements. For example:

- “[I would need] a lot more time to read, study & understand the new system changes, which equates to less time caring for children, parents and staff needs. Paperwork in our field is so excessive now as it is.”

Respondents want to see expanded definitions of what “counts” toward Parent Aware training requirements including better alignment with teacher licensing requirements, value and recognition placed on early educators’ years of experience, and credit given for time spent working with a coach.

In the survey, some shared broader feedback about which trainings or other professional development activities count toward Parent Aware requirements.

Alignment with licensure. Many respondents questioned why trainings required for maintaining a teaching license (presumably a birth-grade 3 or K-6 teaching license) do not count as Parent Aware-approved trainings.

- “Licensed teachers are required to complete trainings per the PELSB determined re-licensure areas. Allowing teachers to use these re-licensure hours as their Parent Aware hours would be extremely beneficial.”
- “I believe that all the trainings I need to take in order to maintain my teaching license should count towards Parent Aware hours. It always seems redundant to take many similar trainings just to meet all

the requirements, especially since the trainings that I often find the most valuable are NOT counted towards Parent Aware hours.”

- “I need the list of teaching licenses to be updated to be modern. There is a ZERO% chance that someone with a Home Ec license is as well prepared to teach the children in my care as someone with a K-6 license.”

Valuing years of experience. Some respondents felt that current Parent Aware requirements do not place enough value on early educators’ years of experience in the CCEE field. These respondents argued that education and training alone do not necessarily guarantee that a program is high quality or implementing best practices, and that their hands-on experience should count for more.

- “I do not believe trainings and degrees necessarily equal high quality care. Experience in the field surely means something as well. Taking the trainings does not mean things from the trainings are implemented in the program. Also, providers can learn a lot from other resources (such as books, blogs, websites, and even conversations with other providers).”
- “I think that experience doesn't carry enough weight in the current system. Also, it is very financially difficult for early childhood employees to pursue degrees, so a system that would honor their experience would be more equitable.”

Specialized certifications and credentials. A few respondents wished that certain specialized certifications or credentials should be added to the list of ways that early educators can meet Parent Aware’s professional requirements. For example:

- “The phrase about ‘having or completing a higher education degree, having a teaching license, OR completing 10 hours of training per year in an expanded number of KCF areas’ NEEDS to also list CDA credential and AMI/AMS diploma as an option! If those credentials which are also recognized by DHS Center licensors are not listed, people will be excluded which I don't believe are meant to be excluded.”

Other comments. In the survey, respondents brought up a range of other activities that they wished would count for Parent Aware training hour requirements. For example, some advocated for time spent with a coach or mentor to count toward training hours, while others critiqued limitations on the timeframe in which course credits count toward requirements.

- “[Group session participants] expressed concerns and frustrations about the way trainers and trainings are approved, and how challenging it is to complete the large number of trainings each year. They also have many trainings and trainers that are not approved, but are critically important to the work they do with their community's children and families. It is frustrating to bring a national trainer to provide two days of training and not have it count for Parent Aware training requirements.”
- “The 5-year lookback time has always been challenging - if you have an amazing teacher with an early childhood degree, but they completed it 7 years ago, those course credits don't count even though they contribute significantly to that teacher's foundation of knowledge. we should be emphasizing depth of learning over recent-ness.”
- “Hours spent with [a] coach counting as training would be very helpful.”

- “More Achieve-approved training options! Training that is offered/accepted for MN State teaching license renewals should all be Develop-approved, as well. Let's share resources and training across the various agencies (MDE, DHS, Head Start) and mixed-delivery system!”

In rural areas of the state with limited training options, some early educators have no choice but to take repetitive courses in order to meet requirements.

In sharing feedback about training requirements, a few respondents also mentioned that some areas of the state (e.g., rural areas) have very limited training options available to early educators. Because of this, some early educators feel that they have no choice but to complete the same trainings multiple times in order to meet requirements, which feels like a poor use of their time. Many would like to see more free or low-cost training options offered across the state, as well as trainings on more varied topics so that early educators can feel like time spent in trainings supports their continued growth and learning rather than just being a box to check off.

- “Rural communities cannot get one on one trainers because of the cost and other issues. DHS requirements are hard to fulfill because of this so we take the same trainings over and over and after a few times no one pays attention because it’s the same ones over and over.”
- “So many of the classes are redundant.”
- “More trainings need to be offered - especially now with outside options not being accepted by Develop. Choices are often limited.”

Topic 8: Supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical and social-emotional well-being

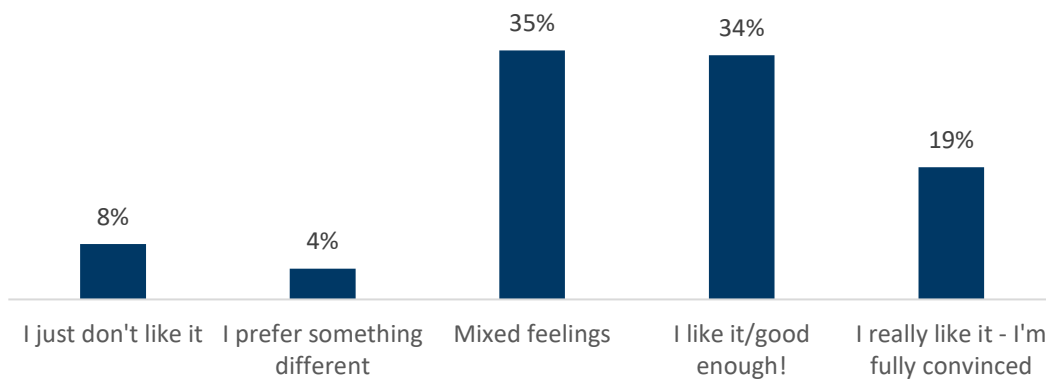
Current	Parent Aware does not currently have indicators on this topic.
Problem	The level of staff turnover in early care and education settings is too high. Children do better when their child care and early education programs are stable and they have time to develop close emotional connections with their early educators. Early educators and administrators do better when they have stable jobs, with positive work environments that offer equitable compensation.
Proposed Change	Early educators and administrators would assess their work environments using the Model Work Standards provided by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. There are separate standards available for center-based and family child care settings. The Model Work Standards tool acknowledges that the needs of children and the needs of their providers are interconnected. Using the results from this tool, programs would work with their coach to co-create goals, including at least one goal related to improving the working environment and at least one goal related to wages and benefits. Any goal related to wages and benefits would be unique for center-based programs compared to family child care programs because they have very different operating structures and expenditures. Coaches would be

well versed in supporting early educators to apply for a REETAIN bonus, and, for eligible programs, to apply for additional monthly compensation through the Great Start Compensation program (a program funded by the Minnesota Legislature where centers and family child care providers can receive a monthly payment in which the explicit purpose is to increase the compensation and benefits of early childhood educators).

Topic 8 discussion

Regarding proposed changes to support early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being, just over half of respondents were in favor of the idea (53%), while around one in three had mixed feelings (35%; see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Respondents’ reactions to ideas for supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being (n=463)



Respondents overwhelmingly agree that low wages are the core issue and that programs cannot make meaningful changes without additional funding.

Although respondents appreciated the intention behind the proposed change, many did not feel they would be enough to meaningfully address challenges impacting the CCEE workforce—particularly those related to wages and benefits. In fact, many saw low wages as the root cause behind other challenges facing the workforce. Staff turnover, for example, may be reduced if it was financially viable for people to stay in the profession long term. One early educator shared this example of how low wages impact staffing at their program:

- “I just had another staff member come to me to say they cannot afford to continue working as a child care provider. I have not had any applicants for two open positions. The child care industry needs help to survive AND to be able to provide high quality care (by being able to hire high quality staff).”
- “Turnover is a wage problem. Period. If child care providers were paid an actual living salary, most would stay the long haul. But, when they are getting paid maybe \$12/hour, they cannot survive on their own.”

- “I don't see this fixing staff turnover.”

Most respondents also felt that programs would not be able to make meaningful improvements to wages and benefits for their staff simply by completing a self-assessment checklist or setting goals with a coach. Rather, most asserted that programs will need additional and sustained funding from an outside source.

- “The goals related to wages and benefits sound nice, but my program can't pay people more without charging families way more than they can afford. We need outside help.”
- “We can't keep increasing wages and benefits indefinitely without pricing families out of care.”

Without additional funding, many pointed out that programs' only viable option would be to pass those costs down to families via increased tuition. Knowing that many families in Minnesota struggle to afford CCEE even now, however, many early educators wanted to avoid raising prices. Some described this tension as a balancing act between managing their own finances (and staff needs) and keeping the cost of care affordable for families:

- “We can set as many goals as we want for this topic, but without actual funding to support staff wages there will never be an improvement. It is a constant battle between keeping the cost of care affordable for families and being able to pay staff livable wages.”

A few early educators were extremely grateful for financial support they have received from existing state programs, such as the Great Start Compensation program, and shared how those resources have helped them better compensate their staff. However, others noted that those existing programs are not sufficient to address low wages and benefits in the long term.

- “Keep the money coming from the state. These grants have been a life saver and have gone straight to the staff. I've been able to raise their wages by 8-10% plus given them bonuses of about \$1,000/year. As long as we can get this money from the state a difference will be made.”
- “We can't significantly raise compensation without outside funding. We already are using Great Start to give staff bonuses. We are nonprofit and run on a tight budget, so it's hard to find extra money to do this without raising rates.”

Some feel the proposed changes place the onus of addressing workforce challenges on individual programs, arguing these issues should instead be addressed through broader systemic changes and investments made at the state level.

In line with feedback related to the need for additional funding, some respondents took issue with the proposed changes, which they felt suggested that individual programs could address workforce challenges on their own if they chose to prioritize them. Many respondents argued that wages and benefits for the CCEE workforce are a systemic issue and therefore need to be addressed with a system-level solution and significant public investment, rather than via Parent Aware quality standards.

- “The state has failed to make child care affordable for families--this is another example of putting the highest demands on the child care provider who is already stretched. We need state investment in child care wages and funding for families.”

- “I don't know if programs should be punished (with a lower score) because of the childcare pay crisis.”
- “Early childhood educators must be compensated fairly for the highly trained and skilled work they are doing! I'm glad to see this component is being added to the redesign, and I like the Model Work Standards being suggested. What I don't like as much is that the burden of improving wages and benefits is still put on the shoulders of the program or the individual. This is a system problem, and we need more government dollars directed [toward] paying ECE workers, as happens with the K-12 system. What I would like to see is that there are automatic wage supports put into place that programs/individuals did not need to apply for!”
- “I don't think that solving the problem of low wages and minimal or no benefits should be on centers. I think this is exactly what the state should be providing for those who work in childcare.”
- “Lots of additional work for minimal return. I am in childcare from my home partly so that I don't have to deal with other people always telling me how to work and run things. Plus, so many state regulations and requirements already that this would be overwhelming!”

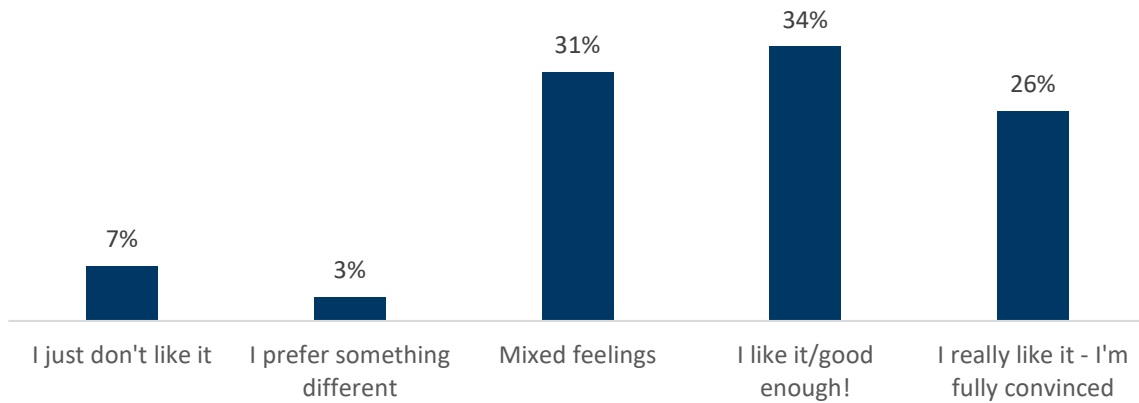
Topic 9: Practices to promote supportive behavior guidance

Current	Parent Aware does not have indicators related to behavior guidance. Child care programs are referred to the Center for Inclusive Child Care and Mental Health Consultation for help with behavior guidance
Problem	Too many young children are suspended or expelled from child care and early education settings, and research shows this occurs more often to children of color, those who speak a language other than English, and those who have special needs.
Proposed Change	Parent Aware could promote programs’ use of trauma-informed, positive behavior guidance rather than exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion. Programs would be supported to have written policies related to using positive guidance practices. The policy would include methods for promoting positive child, staff and family relationships; strategies supporting positive behavior and peer interactions; and supports for children and staff. The policy would include a way to support families to move to a different setting if it is determined, in partnership with the family, that a child care setting is not able to meet a child’s needs. Access to training on positive behavior guidance and trauma-informed care, along with coaching and mental health consultation to help administrators and early educators use positive behavior guidance practices, would be widely available.

Topic 9 discussion

When it came to proposed changes related to promoting supportive behavioral guidance, over half of respondents (60%) liked this proposed change, just under one third (31%) of respondents reported mixed feelings, and 10 percent didn’t support the change (see Figure 16).

Figure 16. Respondents’ reactions to ideas for practices to promote supportive behavior guidance (n=550)



Some respondents feel strongly that programs should be able to terminate families who are not a good fit, as behavioral issues significantly impact the well-being of early educators and other children.

Some respondents were opposed to the proposed changes to promote supportive behavioral guidance because they felt that programs should always have the ability to terminate families if needed. Many pointed out that the option to terminate helps protect the well-being of not only program staff but also the other children enrolled.

- “There would be barriers for everyone if this change was adopted. Immediate termination of a child is sometimes necessary for the health and wellbeing of staff and other children. I have had staff quit their position due to a child that was hurting them or causing so much stress in the room they were unable to face coming to work.”
- “Unless you are going to be able to fund 1:1 care for some of these children you are asking too much for many providers. There are simply some children that cannot or should not be in group care. We need to also make sure that we are caring for our providers.”

This theme was particularly prevalent among family-based early educators, who further noted that preventing the termination of families could pose a genuine safety concern in smaller or home-based settings with only one adult present.

- “When you are [a] Family Child Care provider and the only one working in a group of children, you have to be able to go to the bathroom and know that the children are safe. You can't always keep a child with behavioral problems for the safety of the entire group.”
- “We're home providers and one person. Kids with behavior issues are expelled because of the challenges they bring. At one point, I had 4 spectrum IEP kids in my program of 10 kids. I can't keep them without a second person, [but] I don't make enough money to hire a [paraprofessional] in my home for each kid.”

Several respondents even suggested the proposed changes were an overreach into early educators' autonomy as private businesses, arguing that the decision to terminate families should lie with early educators and should not have anything to do with Parent Aware or Quality Ratings.

- “The health and well-being of the Center as a whole, as well as the child, and liability concerns must be taken into consideration when keeping any child that has persistent episodes of challenging behavior or special needs [in a program]. Parent Aware has no business making that [the] basis for a rating.”
- “Again, this is a business, and we should not be dictating how a provider dictates their private business.”

Others feel the proposed changes put too much responsibility on programs, without acknowledging the need for families' buy-in and collaboration.

Related to concerns about preventing early educators from terminating families, some felt that the proposed changes did not appropriately acknowledge the importance of family involvement to address persistent behavioral issues. Some early educators pointed out that families may not be willing or able to work with their early educators toward productive solutions, meaning that they perceived the proposed changes to be placing requirements on early educators for situations that may not be fully in their control.

- “This is interfering with how we run our programs. This has been implemented in other states and has severely restricted programs from terminating contracts with families that do not "fit" in your program setting. Families who are unwilling to work with the child care program when an issue arises is generally why care is terminated, not due to the child's behavior, language skills, race or disability. Parents need to be willing to be educated and work with their child care to help their child become a successful part of society as an adult.”
- “In my experience, the behavior problem comes from the family not wanting to set rules and/or boundaries in the house - usually to avoid fights, other [times due] to lack of parental skills/education. This just leads to problems in daycares, where we need boundaries and rules.”
- “Parents also need to be involved in the change. Kids need to talk and be respectful. If that doesn't start in the home, then I wouldn't want to work with that family either. Parents need the change, then kids will follow.”

Some suggested that additional, complementary initiatives to promote parents' education and involvement would be needed in order for the change to be successful.

- “I do not think this is enough to fix the issues. We have a large amount of children that have been expelled from other programs. More support is needed. Pairing in other ideas and initiatives like parent education, parent involvement, and partnership with the district (without wait lists for programing supports) should be in this as well.”
- “If this is to be implemented, I believe the approach should be to teach parents how to model and establish a routine, boundaries, and appropriate behavior.”

Programs need training, a strong network of wrap-around supports, and financial support to effectively promote supportive behavioral guidance.

In line with respondents’ comments about the importance of family involvement, many called for a “full community approach” and wrap-around services to effectively promote supportive behavioral guidance. In particular, respondents want to see more staff training in topics such as trauma-informed care, family education, and better coordination with school districts. Others advocated for making more trained support staff available to early educators when difficult situations arise (e.g., home visitors, coaches, mental health consultants).

- “[We need] a full community approach. This should include staff training, parent education, district support too. We have had several trainers and courses on trauma informed care, but moving it into action with the relationship piece is where the work is truly done. Ideally, additional staffing would be helpful to work through these things and set good routines for all.”
- “[We need] training for staff [and] time and money to do this training. Access to qualified coaches and mental health consultants.”
- “Maybe [we need] support [from] staff able to do home visits, parent education, or coaching right onsite. The last area I worked in had a lot of people trained in Triple P [Positive Parenting Program] and offered a lot of parent coaching. [Our programs] just don't have the bandwidth.”

In identifying these additional resources that programs will need, however, many also acknowledged that most require funding and/or time:

- “[We need] funding to support the child if their needs are very high [and] possibly a state paid support assistant for the program.”
- “My only hesitation is the lack of resources to support non-exclusionary early childhood practices. Those of us who solely receive school readiness dollars do not have access to social work, ESL [English as a Second Language], psychology, and other specialty professionals due to [our] structure and funding. We are simply not able to spread the resources so thin and still keep kids and staff safe.”

Topic 10: Expanding search options on the Parent Aware website to help families learn about what makes programs unique

<p>Current</p>	<p>The Parent Aware website is designed to encourage families to prioritize Star Ratings in their search for child care and early education programs for their children, with a small number of additional search criteria to help them narrow their search. Programs can share things that are unique about them in their philosophy statement, but families cannot search in a way that allows them to easily find programs using the information in the philosophy statement</p>
<p>Problem</p>	<p>Quality can mean different things to different families, depending on their children’s needs. Parent Aware does not currently offer a wide variety of search criteria that would help families find programs that meet their unique needs.</p>

<p>Proposed Change</p>	<p>Parent Aware could offer ways for child care and early education programs to provide more information about their programs in a way that is searchable for families. For example, families with children with special needs may be interested in searching for programs with early educators with training or education specifically on serving children with special needs. Or they may wish to find programs using a particular curriculum, or that spend significant amounts of time outdoors each day. Programs with these characteristics would share this information in the Parent Aware application process, and the Parent Aware website would allow families to include these features in the search criteria they select</p>
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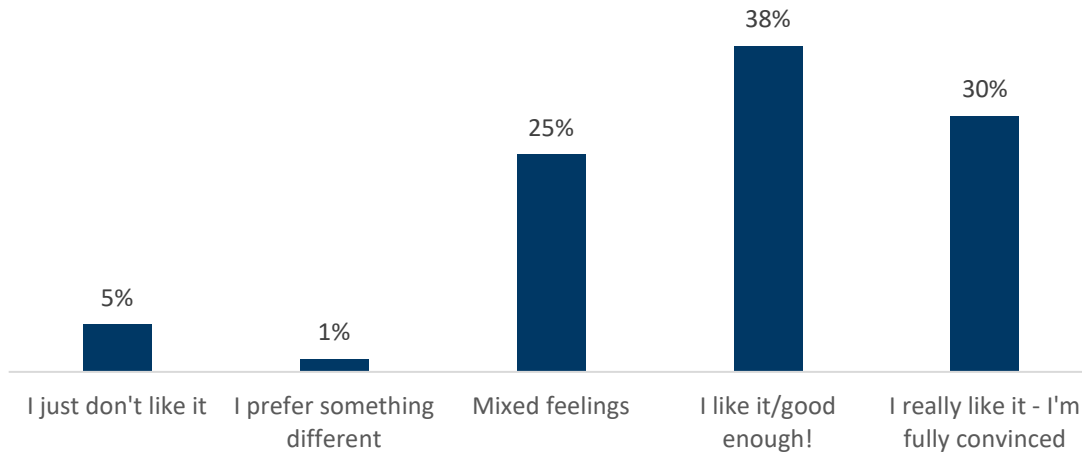
Topic 10 discussion

Most respondents are in favor of expanding search options, noting it could help early educators showcase their unique strengths while also benefiting families searching for care.

As shown in Figure 17, more than two thirds of all respondents were in favor of expanding the search filters available on the Parent Aware website. Most felt that expanding search options would not only benefit early educators, but also families. Providers could benefit from having new ways to highlight the services they offer and what makes their programs unique. Then, in turn, families could benefit from having more information available to them when searching for a CCEE program that suits their family’s unique needs.

- “[This] would be a FANTASTIC tool for parents if it worked well and we had good provider participation in providing these extra details for search criteria. I also think it would be good for the programs as another way for them to differentiate themselves and to stand out from other programs that may be similar in other ways. I also think it could get programs thinking deeper about professional development goals.”
- “I think different [search filters] allowing parents to search for programs based on their wants/needs will be great for the family experience.

Figure 17. Respondents’ reactions to ideas for expanding search options on the Parent Aware website (n=419)



In explaining their support for expanded search options, several respondents also acknowledged that every family has different preferences and needs, some of which may be culturally specific. In this way, they felt that expanded search filters could help the Parent Aware search tool better meet the diverse needs of families.

- “I like it. Each family has a different preference for what they are looking for.”
- “This is a positive way for programs to promote what they are proud of! And, it helps focus on specific education or cultural notes programs might have to appeal to parents.”

Some respondents foresee challenges with keeping information in the search tool up to date—particularly if the website is not improved so it’s easier for early educators to make timely updates.

Although most respondents were in favor of expanding search filters on the Parent Aware website, some raised concerns about potential barriers to keeping early educators’ information up to date. Some respondents questioned whether early educators should be required to update certain information on a regular basis, especially considering that many programs are missing information for optional filters in the current website. Others acknowledged that some types of information, such as program openings, change so frequently that it may be difficult or burdensome for early educators to provide timely updates.

- “This sounds good on the surface. However, unless programs update openings, which is extremely difficult, given daily/weekly changes - having info about an ideal program is useless if you can't enroll your child.”
- “Maybe if there was a way to make it required [for providers] to fill out some of these things?”
- “Keeping it updated should be a requirement [for providers] in order to get to the next [Star Rating] level or to spend their grant dollars.”

Regarding barriers to keeping programs’ information up to date, many respondents also had concerns about the current website. Several early educators shared personal experiences where they had difficulty using the website, citing issues like long loading screens and delays in information they submit being posted online.

Others called for upgrades to modernize the website and ensure it is user-friendly, noting that early educators will be less likely to provide timely updates if the website is difficult to navigate or slow to reflect changes.

- “The website would have to be working well. Right now, I never know if my updated info is there, because it always tells me it's still processing previous updates. If it's not [an] easy to update website, it won't get used. I only update now because it's a requirement of the Great Start grant, otherwise I wouldn't bother too much with it because I can't see my updates right away and I don't know if I'm wasting my time.”
- “[The website needs to be] easy to update if your program changes, for example [if] you were play based but then purchase [a] box curriculum, or you want to take part time families in the summer so you want to edit your openings easily.”
- “Improve the Parent Aware website and information areas [filters] that already exist. Make it so updates are reflected immediately, or folks won't want to use it.”

A few respondents have questions or concerns about the process for ensuring the accuracy of self-reported information from early educators.

Respondents also flagged some possible unintended consequences of expanding search filters, including issues with the accuracy of information that programs self-report. Some respondents were specifically concerned that expanded filters might lead some programs to misrepresent their practices, either to capitalize on “buzz words” or trends in CCEE that might pique families’ interest (e.g., nature-based care) or due to their own misunderstanding of what certain practices entail (e.g., Montessori or Reggio-inspired curricula).

- “It would be easy for programs to use hot topics like "nature-based" and "reggio-inspired" to catch the attention of potential families without necessarily executing well on this.”
- “[This change] may cause some programs to be avoided, or may cause providers to use specialized philosophies as "buzz words," claiming to be nature-based, Montessori, etc. when they aren't.”

Other respondents shared more general concerns about whether and how programs would have their information verified or be held accountable for implementing the practices they claim.

- “Programs may report that they implement certain practices/policies, but who is holding them accountable to actually doing them? In addition, programs may report that they have certain training, but that is largely dependent on individual staff members...and staff come and go all the time. How will this information be kept up to date?”
- “How does a center get held accountable for what they check off? Like, if a center says they are play based, nature based, [or] have specially trained staff... how do they prove that they are actually doing this? My unintended consequence is what if the honest and knowledgeable people get penalized for not claiming to do all the things that others may claim either out of dishonesty or ignorance of what those options mean.”

Family feedback on search filters: insight from focus groups

As part of another component of the Parent Aware Evaluation, the Child Trends team conducted focus groups with families across Minnesota to learn about their experiences finding and accessing child care and early education for a child aged five or younger. Because the timing of those focus groups coincided with efforts to engage stakeholders for feedback on proposed changes to Parent Aware, Child Trends asked families about a select number of proposed changes that were most relevant to how families experience Parent Aware. Insights from those focus groups are provided below.

Families suggest a variety of additional search criteria for Parent Aware—some of which are existing filters where many early educators simply have missing or out-of-date information.

Many families in the focus groups wished that program openings and costs were available in Parent Aware’s website search tool. One family described why an up-to-date filter on openings would be beneficial:

- “Vacancies... knowing ahead of time whether you’re gonna make 20 phone calls just for them all to say that you’re on a wait list and good luck, or that [they] actually do have available space and for what age groups and when.” – Family Focus Group Participant

Related to openings, some families also talked specifically about teacher-child ratios and wanting to see information about programs’ staffing, as some had past experiences wherein staffing shortages at their program led to instability in their schedule:

- “There [were] a few instances where the daycare has had to remind parents [to] pick up kids on a timely basis. Last summer, ... we had to actually adjust our schedule so that, since [the program] had a staffing shortage, they could still meet the criteria [for] the number of kids.” – Family Focus Group Participant

Some families wanted to see more information about programs’ experiences working with children with different needs within the search tool. One family explained that they weren’t necessarily looking for an early educator with specific qualifications or credentials, but rather for an early educator who was prepared to work with her child and their unique needs:

- “Because my youngest [is] autistic, that would be important – to find a provider that has dealt with kids with autism or [who] are on the spectrum. Not necessarily [providers] that can give them therapies, but just knowing how to handle them because [my child] has some fits and it’s hard for him to transition from one thing to another. He doesn’t eat a lot. He has like 5 safe foods. I think that would be important to filter - to [find] a place that could take on a child that is autistic.” – Family Focus Group Participant

Other families wanted to learn more about the early educators’ unique philosophies, approaches to caregiving, and what makes them passionate about child care:

- “I would appreciate background on the provider ... almost like a little resume. Here’s some things I’m interested in. Here’s what I’m passionate about. [Here’s] why they went into being a daycare provider. And any sort of training. ... Then you would have an idea of ohh, they worked in this setting for 10 years

and now they're running a daycare because they had two of their own kids. OK, then [you'd know] they'd have exposure to multiple different kids and different needs." – Family Focus Group Participant

Using the search tool to filter for programs' Star Ratings and other preferred characteristics is challenging for some families, particularly in rural areas where CCEE options are limited.

Some families in the focus groups felt the Parent Aware search tool was less beneficial in communities where there are only a few early educators. One parent shared their experience looking for care in Morris, Minnesota:

- "For me, when I tried using the Parent Aware website, a lot of the in-home daycares around here are not part of that, and so that information wasn't available. And, being that we only have one child care center, it only populated 1 result like that was the only result. And, Morris is kind of like the central hub." – Family Focus Group Participant

Another family shared that the lack of variability in programs' Star Ratings in their area might dilute the meaning of the Ratings and how much they can inform families' decisions about CCEE programs:

- "Since we were talking about [the search tool], I just happened to log on real quick to look at the centers in our area for the [ratings]. I kept hitting load, and there are only four star [programs]. So, I kind of even feel like in our area, it's great - everybody's four star from here to Farmington, to Hastings, to Northfield, etc. I guess at some point, though, I really wouldn't hold the star rating as much like... not 'credibility,' but if everybody's in the same ballpark, then it's like, OK, what's the next thing? I don't know if I would necessarily be like, 'I've gotta make sure [my program is] four star,' because it seems like every center that's within any type of mileage of my kids' preschool is four star rated." – Family Focus Group Participant

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Key themes and future directions

Across all the proposed changes to Parent Aware, respondents' most common concerns are about time and cost.

Early educators are among one of the lowest paid professions in the country, and the impacts of those low wages combined with other compounding stressors such as industry-wide staffing shortages were apparent in much of respondents' feedback on the proposed changes to Parent Aware. Many noted that the Rating process already takes considerable time and effort, and therefore their primary concerns with the proposed changes were about the time and money needed to implement them. For example, expanding observations into all child care and early education settings for all Star Rating levels (topic 6) or offering more intensive and ongoing coaching to Rated programs (topic 1) would not only require more time and effort from early educators, but also from the coaches and other support staff who work with them. In some cases, respondents acknowledged that the proposed changes were intended to make the Rating process easier but were nonetheless concerned about time and capacity. Because early educators and others working within Parent Aware are familiar with the system as it currently is, any changes—even those intended to reduce burden—will require those individuals to re-learn a new system and adjust their practices to align with new processes and requirements. Similarly, changes will also require time and cost at the system level, including for things like updating Parent Aware materials and documentation, communicating changes to the public, and training coaches and other support staff on new processes. Some respondents were skeptical as to whether certain proposed changes, such as those to Parent Aware terminology (topic 1), would be meaningful enough to warrant the time and financial investment needed to implement them.



Future direction: As state policy decision-makers reflect on feedback from stakeholders, carefully considering the costs and benefits of implementing each proposed change, it may be beneficial to get very specific with what it would take to successfully implement each change (e.g., updates to materials, training needs, coach capacity, public communications) as well as what the desired outcomes would be (e.g., a streamlined process, supporting quality improvements in a specific area, gaining buy-in from early educators). This approach will help ensure each proposed change adds value commensurate with the investment needed to implement it. Further, the department should consider the costs and benefits

not only of each individual change, but also of all the proposed changes to help make decisions about the budget and timeline for implementation. If resources are limited, either in terms of financial cost or early educators' capacity, the department may need to make decisions about what changes to start with, which to save for later (or implement slowly over time), and which to eliminate.

The Rating process is particularly cumbersome for family-based early educators, and some feel the proposed changes would only increase that burden.

While challenges such as low wages and long hours impact the child care and early education workforce as a whole, these issues tend to affect family-based early educators more acutely. Family-based early educators are often a staff of one, meaning they are responsible not only for caring for the children, but also for managing the business operations of their program and ensuring compliance with licensing and other regulations. Because of this, the Rating process can be particularly cumbersome for family-based early educators, and many survey respondents were wary of proposed changes that could add to the time the process takes for this population specifically. For example, many were concerned about requiring self-assessments (topic 4) and/or observations (topics 4 and 6) in all settings, rather than only requiring observations in center-based programs seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating (as it currently is), due to the disruptions that visitors can cause to children's routines. Some respondents felt these changes might dissuade family-based early educators from becoming Rated or seeking a higher Star Rating.



Future direction: As the department begins exploring which of the proposed changes to move forward with, which to modify, and which to table or abandon, attention should be paid to whether the changes would equitably impact early educators in different program settings, and particularly think through the impact on family-based early educators. To aid in decision making, it may again be

beneficial to consider the differential costs and benefits of implementing each change for different types of programs and also to engage early educators to understand their experiences and perspectives. For example, if the goal of adding observations in all settings (topic 6) is to support improved adult-child interactions but family-based early educators feel that the disruptions caused by on-site visits do not outweigh the benefits, perhaps the department could explore alternate methods, such as allowing early educators to submit their own video-recorded observations or attend a workshop on positive adult-child interactions. Alternatively, this approach could help identify areas where Parent Aware incentives could be increased (or altered) so that early educators feel that their efforts to become Rated are worthwhile.

Respondents had mixed opinions about most of the proposed changes to Parent Aware, underscoring the importance of ongoing and iterative stakeholder engagement to ensure changes meet community needs.

For nearly all of the proposed changes, respondents' reactions were very mixed and sometimes contradictory. Around a third of respondents had "mixed feelings" about each proposed change, and often the number of respondents in favor of each idea was comparable to the number against it. Even for topics where the majority of respondents said they were in favor of a change, many nonetheless shared more specific questions, concerns, and ideas in their responses to open-ended follow up questions. In topic 7, for example, nearly two-thirds of respondents were in favor of the proposed changes to how Parent Aware supports providers' professional

growth and learning. However, many still shared feedback on other ways they think the requirements could be clarified or improved (feedback on topic 7 is discussed further below).



Future direction: As the department explores stakeholders’ feedback on the proposed changes, the goal should not be to simply decide whether to move forward with each idea or not, but rather to understand which specific elements of each idea respondents liked and which they had concerns about. While it may not be possible to identify an approach that addresses the needs and concerns of all stakeholders across the state, deeper exploration of the specific points of feedback shared through the survey could help refine ideas to ensure they meet the needs of as many people as possible. Ongoing engagement with early educators, coaches, and other key stakeholders is also crucial to gather input on refined ideas and to gain community trust and buy-in for the Parent Aware Redesign as a whole.

Many think that simplifying the Rating process should be a priority—particularly as it relates to professional development requirements.

Within comments about the Parent Aware Rating process being too time-consuming or burdensome for early educators, many respondents specifically mentioned professional development requirements as a significant barrier. In feedback on the proposed changes to how Parent Aware supports early educators’ professional growth and learning (topic 7), many appreciated the efforts to simplify requirements but also shared suggestions for additional ways to better accomplish that goal. In particular, some advocated for expanding the definition of what kinds of professional activities “count” toward Parent Aware requirements. Respondents specifically mentioned wanting requirements to better align with licensing and other ECE-related systems (e.g., K-12 education, CDA credentialing), to place more value on years of experience and time spent with a coach or mentor, and to streamline the process for new training to become approved in Develop.



Future direction: In addition to considering the changes proposed to professionalism requirements (topic 7), the department may also want to consider some of the suggestions respondents shared regarding activities they wish counted toward those requirements. Periodically assessing the extent to which the Rating process aligns with other processes and regulations for child care and early education programs—including licensing, credentialing, and higher education, for example—may help shed light on system-level gaps or redundancies. This information can then be used to refine the Rating process to ensure it adds unique value to early educators’ continued professional growth without creating undue burden or duplication with other systems.

Coaches will be crucial to facilitating a successful rollout of any changes to Parent Aware.

Across proposed changes, respondents emphasized that early educators will need support from skilled coaches who are equipped with the knowledge and training needed to support them in navigating any new or modified Parent Aware processes. For example, in topics 4 and 6, which proposed expanding the list of observation and self-assessment tools programs can choose to use as part of the Rating process, many noted that they would need help from a coach to understand the differences between the tools, choose the right one for their program, and use the results for professional development. In the same vein, however, some were concerned about whether Parent Aware currently has the coach capacity to facilitate the implementation of such

widespread changes, noting that more coaches and more intensive training for coaches will be costly and also take time.



Future direction: Before the department finalizes any changes to Parent Aware, first assess how each change would impact the workloads of coaches, professional development advisors, raters, and other support staff, and then craft timelines for implementing changes accordingly. If Parent Aware’s current capacity is not sufficient to meet the need associated with a given change, for example, those gaps should be addressed before the change is implemented. Knowing that many respondents have concerns about changes creating confusion or added burden for early educators, implementing any changes without sufficient support in place may result in frustration and lost community buy-in for Parent Aware.

Respondents want to see Parent Aware prioritize accessibility by providing materials and other supports (e.g., coaching, training) in multiple languages and ensuring public-facing resources are clear, helpful, and user-friendly.

In reflecting on the proposed changes, many respondents mentioned the need for Parent Aware to offer materials and other supports in multiple languages—both to support early educators in navigating the Rating process and to effectively communicate changes to the public. For example, some early educators shared that they have staff at their programs who speak a language other than English and would therefore need translated materials or on-site training in another language to help them become familiar with new Rating processes, terms, and requirements outlined in topic 1. Language accessibility was also a concern regarding the draft alignment chart in topic 3, as some respondents noted that the format, heavy use of text, and technical terminology may make it challenging for families or individuals who speak another language to make sense of the information. Likewise, regarding supports to help programs collect feedback from their families via surveys (topic 5), some mentioned that Parent Aware would need to share survey items and outreach language in multiple languages to ensure all families have a way to provide feedback. Others brought up accessibility more generally in terms of use of plain language (e.g., avoiding jargon or acronyms) and ensuring online processes are user friendly (e.g., improving websites like Develop or offering technological support to programs).



Future direction: To ensure Parent Aware can support the needs of the diverse early educators and families across Minnesota, the department should continue its efforts to make content more accessible. This could include translating Parent Aware materials (including the Rating application), guidance for early educators, and information tailored to families to help them understand Ratings and choose a program that meets their needs. This could also include hiring more multilingual coaches, trainers, and other support staff to help early educators navigate the Rating process if written information is not available in their preferred language. Importantly, creating more accessible content could also mean simplifying existing materials to ensure they are concise and use plain language as well as improving the usability of tools such as the Parent Aware website and Develop.

The Automatic One-Star legislation has significant implications for the Parent Aware Redesign, as many respondents have concerns about fairness for programs Rated through the current process and how families will perceive One-Star Ratings.

Respondents had very mixed feelings about the upcoming rollout of Automatic One-Star Ratings in all licensed child care and early education programs beginning in July 2026 (topic 2). While some were opposed to the legislation because they felt Parent Aware should be a truly voluntary opt-in system, others had more specific concerns. For example, many felt that giving One-Star Ratings to all programs in good standing with licensing would be unfair to those programs Rated through the current process. Family-based early educators worry that they might be stigmatized for being a One-Star program, as families might perceive a One-Star Rating as worse than no Rating at all. Families expressed similar sentiments in the supplemental focus groups that Child Trends led this spring, with some perceiving a One-Star Rating to mean the program does not meet baseline expectations. Notably, even across the other nine proposed changes included in the survey, many respondents mentioned the Automatic One-Star legislation in explaining their feedback. In considering the proposed change of dropping the term “Quality Rating Levels” for “Quality Recognition Levels” (topic 1), for example, some respondents argued that Parent Aware should move to a Five-Star scale so there would be space to differentiate programs that received a One-Star Rating through the current process from those who will earn one via the Automatic One-Star Rating process in the future.



Future direction: As the department begins planning for the implementation of Automatic One-Star Ratings in 2026, they should consider strategies to address the concerns raised by stakeholders via this engagement effort. In line with the fact that many respondents spoke about the Automatic One-Star legislation in their answers to all 10 topics, it may be helpful to consider this feedback in

the context of some of the other proposed changes. For example, because many respondents’ concerns about the legislation were related to how a One-Star Rating would be perceived, changes to how Parent Aware classifies quality levels (e.g., as “Recognition Levels” as proposed in topic 1) could potentially help alleviate some of those concerns. As the department refines the proposed changes to Parent Aware, it may be helpful to re-engage stakeholders to ensure that any revisions sufficiently address their concerns. The department may wish to re-engage families in this process to understand how they understand any changes to how Parent Aware classifies quality and to inform public messaging about the Automatic One-Star rollout.

Workforce challenges (wages, staff turnover, etc.) loomed large across topics, and many feel that additional and sustained funding is needed to address them.

Importantly, many of the broader challenges impacting the child care and early education workforce came up across respondents’ feedback on all 10 topics. Regarding proposed changes to Parent Aware’s professionalism requirements (topic 7), for example, many noted that staffing challenges in center-based programs can make it challenging to meet training hour requirements, as high turnover means that staff are more frequently cycling in and out of their programs. Similarly, respondents who were opposed to certain changes that could increase burden for early educators often mentioned factors such as low wages, insufficient benefits, and other stressors facing the workforce in their rationale. For the proposed changes to help support early educators in achieving economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being (topic 8), most respondents appreciated the intention behind the proposed changes and agreed these issues should be prioritized, noting that they see addressing workforce wages, retention, and well-being as directly related to Parent Aware’s goal of supporting quality in programs. However, many also argued that programs would not be able to achieve things like improved wages

and benefits for their staff simply by setting goals, but rather would need additional and sustained funding to make any meaningful improvements.

Future direction: In considering ways for Parent Aware to better support early educators’ economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being, the department should be mindful of the broader, systemic challenges facing the child care and early education sector. Issues such as low wages and benefits for early educators are pervasive not only in Minnesota but also across the country. Addressing these system-level challenges will require system-level solutions as well as significant and sustained investments over time. If the department chooses to add any quality practices related to staff wages and benefits within the Rating process, attention should be paid to how those practices are framed—particularly to ensure that early educators feel the additions are supportive, rather than like Parent Aware is placing the onus of addressing system-level issues on their shoulders. Alternatively, it may be worth considering whether Parent Aware is the right mechanism to address these issues.



Next steps

The information gathered in this engagement process and summarized in this report will be used to complete a report to the Minnesota Legislature, due December 2024. The report to the Minnesota Legislature will summarize the overall Parent Aware evaluation findings, including findings from this report, and provide the Department of Children, Youth, and Families Commissioner’s recommendations for revisions to Parent Aware, potential future evaluations, and plans for continuous improvement.

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- Allison VanLoon - Oak Haven Church
- Amberlie Haak
- Amy Loetz
- Amy Warzybok - Dodge Nature Preschool
- Ann Holub - Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Child Care Aware of MN
- Ann Lang - Twin Lakes STEM Academy Childcare Center
- Anna Dutke - Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors (MnECO)
- Anne Kubesh - Pine Technical & Community College
- Apple Gabriel
- Ariane Bromberg
- Brandy Sroga-Coons - Creative Kids Academy

- Brenda Jensen
- Brita Comstock - Warroad Public Schools
- Brittany Sullivan
- Candace Yates - Think Small
- Carrie Bollig
- Casie Jackson - Licensing coordinator - Authorized Agent
- Channon Richardson
- Cheryl Thomas
- Christy Berg - Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties
- Celeste Finn
- Clare Sanford - MN Child Care Association
- Corinne Woosley - Minneapolis and Dakota Technical Colleges
- Courtney Greiner - Mini Mos Child Care and Preschool
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- Jessica Sylvester
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- Jill Mogensen
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- Mallory Plotz - Families First of MN - Child Care Aware
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- Molly Hughes
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Appendices

This report provides two appendices: 1) the survey questions used in the second engagement process, and 2) the Overview of Proposed Changes handout used in the second engagement process.

The department provided additional materials for Ambassadors to use in the engagement process. These included: 1) Ambassador Guide, 2) Session Handout for Ambassadors, 3) Session Handout for Participants in Sessions, 4) Draft Alignment Chart of Processes and Quality Practices. Copies of these additional materials are available upon request.

Appendix I: Questions in second engagement

For the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators second engagement, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) requested input on ideas for changes to Parent Aware. The following questions were asked in the second engagement survey and during the group sessions led by Parent Aware Ambassadors.

Topics: Ideas for changes to Parent Aware

There are ten (10) ideas for changes to Parent Aware that you can discuss with your group. The ideas and some questions for the group are provided below for your reference during the session. Each idea explains how Parent Aware is currently, the problem or challenge with the current system, and the idea for how to change it.

You likely will not have time during the group session to discuss all 10 ideas, so we'll ask you to choose 3-4 to discuss with your group. If you run out of time and you are interested in hearing some of the other ideas for changes to Parent Aware and sharing your thoughts, there are other ways to share your feedback! After the session, you will have the option to also complete the [individual survey](#) online where you can add written feedback on the ideas.

Topics for Group Discussion

Topic 1: Emphasizing quality recognition and continuous quality improvement over Ratings.

Topic 2: Automatic One-Star Ratings.

Topic 3: Aligning Rating requirements and monitoring processes for child care, Pre-K, and Head Start.

Topic 4: Supporting programs to provide quality learning environments that are culturally, linguistically, and ability affirming.

Topic 5: Supporting early educators to engage in ongoing family communication.

Topic 6: Expanding observations and coaching on child-adult interactions in all settings, but without being scored for Ratings.

Topic 7: Supporting early educators' and administrators' growth through customized training.

Topic 8: Supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being.

Topic 9: Practices to promote supportive behavior guidance.

Topic 10: Expanding search options on the Parent Aware website to help families learn about what makes programs unique.

Topic 1 (Required): Emphasize quality recognition and continuous quality improvement over Ratings.

Current: Parent Aware provides indicators of quality. Child care and early education providers submit evidence they meet the indicators, and this information is used to calculate Ratings. Ratings are displayed on the ParentAware.org website. Child care and early education providers receive support to submit evidence. Child care

providers have access to a range of coaching options, with some receiving a small amount of help, and others receiving more.

Problem: Child care programs spend considerable time documenting and uploading the evidence to meet Parent Aware indicators of quality, and this time could be spent working with a coach assessing current practices and improving practices that benefit children, families, and their staff. Additionally, terms like “indicators” and “ratings” are abstract and can make the rating process feel stressful for programs.

Idea: Parent Aware could focus more on recognizing programs’ strengths and emphasize continuous quality improvement over ratings. One way to accomplish this could be to revise some of the language and processes Parent Aware uses. For example, Parent Aware could drop the term “ratings” and instead call them “quality recognition levels.” And, instead of a complex set of “quality indicators” that programs have to submit extensive evidence for, Parent Aware could offer a simplified set of “quality practices” that programs will be supported to work toward. These quality practices could emphasize the experiences children, families, and early educators will have if these practices are used and recognize programs for making progress toward those practices with fewer or more flexible evidence requirements. Similarly, Parent Aware could provide more intensive coaching and other supports to help programs assess their quality, set goals, and work toward them. The questions throughout this guide have additional examples of how changes to Parent Aware could help emphasize quality recognition and improvement over ratings, and more information can also be found here in the [Parent Aware Overview of Proposed Changes and Revised Quality Practices](#) document.

The draft new framework provides the quality practices in three categories: 1) Children, 2) Families, and 3) Early Educators. More information can be found in the overview document linked above. This document is provided to help you get a sense of how the new process would work and what the expectations could be. You can review and share more feedback on this and other proposed changes via an online survey after the session.

Questions:

- a. How do you feel about these ideas for changing Parent Aware language and framing?

	Strongly prefer	Somewhat prefer	No opinion	Somewhat prefer	Strongly prefer	
Old term: “Quality rating levels”						New term: “Quality recognition levels”
Old term: “Quality indicators”						New term: “Quality practices”

- b. Please explain your answer. If you have other ideas for how to address the problem, we’d love to hear them!
- c. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- d. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- e. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?

Topic 2 (Required): Rolling out automatic One-Star Ratings for all licensed providers.

Current: There are indicators licensed child care programs must meet in order to earn a One Star Rating. However, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law that all licensed child care programs will be assigned a One Star Parent Aware Rating, unless they opt out. This change is planned for July 1, 2026.

Problem: More providers are needed to serve children with Early Learning Scholarships, which families may use only in Rated child care and early education programs. In addition, becoming licensed is an achievement in the quality improvement journey. Parent Aware does not currently recognize all child care providers who have achieved this important milestone with a Star Rating.

Idea: Starting July 1, 2026, all licensed child care programs will automatically receive a One Star Rating. The idea is for the current One Star Rating requirements to no longer be required, and for all licensed programs in good standing with licensing to automatically receive a One Star Rating, unless they choose to apply for a higher Star Rating or opt out of being Rated. Programs that wish to opt out of the Automatic One Star Rating would have the option to check a box on a website.

Questions:

1. What is your initial reaction to this change?
2. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
3. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative – when this change is implemented?
4. What do you think this change will mean for...
 - a. Programs that are currently One-Star Rated? (i.e., What policies, processes, or messaging would be most helpful for programs that already earned a One-Star Rating through the current Rating process?)
 - b. Programs that are currently Rated at Two Stars or higher? (i.e. do you think they are more likely to maintain their higher Rating, or choose to receive the Automatic One Star Rating?)
 - c. Programs that are not currently Rated? (i.e., do you think programs not currently Rated are likely to accept the Automatic One Star Rating, or opt out? What incentives or supports might encourage currently unrated programs to seek a higher Star Rating?)

Topic 3 (Optional): Ensuring Rating requirements and monitoring processes for child care, Pre-K, and Head Start are closely aligned and not duplicative.

Current: Parent Aware has different Rating Pathways for different program types, with some program types being required to document their quality for more indicators than other program types because each program type has different requirements in law. For example, because center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs are monitored by the Office of Head Start and have to adhere to federal Head Start Program Performance Standards, they can automatically receive a Four-Star Rating by way of an application that is built into existing annual monitoring processes in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education. No alignment chart of requirements across program types is published.

Problem: There is misunderstanding about the alignment between program types, with some program types feeling like they are required to do more to demonstrate their quality.

Idea: Publish an alignment chart that shows the processes and requirements for each program type, Head Start, school-based Pre-K, and accredited programs. The alignment chart would show how the requirements of each of the monitoring entities (e.g., the U.S. Office of Head Start for Head Start programs) would be leveraged to demonstrate quality for participation in Parent Aware. You can see the draft alignment chart here: [Quality Processes and Standards: Alignment Chart Draft](#), and you can review and share more feedback via the individual online survey after the session if you prefer.

Questions:

- a. Do you think publishing an alignment chart like the draft linked above will help clarify some of the misunderstandings about the Rating process for different types of programs?
- b. Is the draft alignment chart clear and understandable? What questions or suggestions do you have about the alignment chart and its purpose?
- c. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 4 (Optional): Supporting programs to provide quality learning environments that are culturally, linguistically, and ability affirming.

Current: Child care programs may earn points towards a Three- or Four-Star Rating by conducting self-assessments of their learning environment and cultural responsiveness and then set goals based on the results.

Problem: Many programs have been in Parent Aware a long time and have already used the self-assessment tools offered (the Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Competency Self-Assessment or the Family and Community Engagement Tool [FaCET]).

Idea: With more assessment tools to choose from and more support to gather feedback from families, programs could learn more about their program on a variety of topics and develop more customized goals to improve their learning environment. For example, Parent Aware could offer a mix of observation tools (which would be conducted on-site by an observer) and self-assessment tools (which would be completed by the provider) that programs could choose from. Providers would work with a coach to complete and review results, co-create goals for improvement, and get connected to additional mentorship, consultation, referrals, and/or training. Program Ratings would not be impacted by their scores on these observations or self-assessments.

Below is a list of possible observation tools and self-assessment tools, including details about what kind of information each collects.

Tool Name and Link	Description
Environment Rating Scales, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) • Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) • Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) 	Supports early educators to improve learning environments in center-based settings. There are different tools for programs serving children of different age groups, and different program types.
Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension (ECERS-E)	Supports early educators serving preschool-aged children to measure quality through four curricular subscales for literacy, mathematics, science, and diversity.
Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES)	Supports early educators to incorporate the cultural knowledge, experiences, and learning and communication styles of children from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.
Teaching Pyramid Observation Tools, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) • Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) 	Supports early educators to use quality practices that support children’s social-emotional development and behavior. This tool is used to assess practices included in the Pyramid Model . There are different tools for early educators serving different age groups.
Inclusive Classroom Profile	Supports early educators to use quality inclusion practices that support the developmental needs of children with disabilities in early childhood settings.
Nature-based Early Childhood Program Assessment & Guidebook provided by the Minnesota Children and Nature Connection	Supports early educators to incorporate nature into its philosophy and policies, family engagement and community connections, and the outdoor and indoor learning environments.
Family and Community Engagement Tools (FaCET)	Supports early educators to assess their program’s child development, program quality, and family and community engagement.
Universal Design for Learning Guidelines	Supports early educators to make learning inclusive and transformative for everyone.
Parent Aware Environmental Self-Assessment	Supports early educators to improve learning environments.
Cultural and Linguistic Competency Self-Assessment by the National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University	Supports early educators to promote cultural and linguistic competence in early intervention and early childhood settings.

Questions:

- d. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change, and specifically the idea of having more tools to choose from to support quality improvement?
- e. Which tools or types of tools are you most interested in using if this option is provided? What kind of information or support would you need to make an informed choice about which tool to use to set goals for improvement?
- f. What else would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- g. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- h. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 5 (Optional): Supporting early educators to engage in ongoing family communication.

Current: Programs earn points toward indicators for having family communication and engagement activities. Using a family survey is one option for family communication.

Problem: There is not a way to ensure families can provide anonymous feedback to child care and early education programs. In addition, Parent Aware does not have an indicator related to culturally affirming activities.

Idea: Parent Aware could support child care programs to offer family surveys in order to receive feedback on how well their family communication and engagement activities are working and gather information about how well their activities reflect children’s lives, abilities, and cultures. Providers’ ratings would not be impacted by the results of the family survey.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 6 (Optional): Expanding observations and coaching on child-adult interactions in all settings, but without being scored for Ratings.

Current: Licensed, non-accredited child care centers with preschool classrooms seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating must be observed and achieve a minimum score on the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System or “CLASS,” an observation tool designed to assess the quality of adult-child interactions. Early educators may receive CLASS coaching to help them meet the CLASS scores required.

Problem: Because a minimum score is required, observations are stressful and high stakes for early educators working in center-based settings. Family child care providers are not observed, are not offered CLASS coaching, and wonder how the Star Rating could be accurate without an onsite visit.

Idea: Adult-child interactions are observed for all programs using one or more adult-child interaction observation tools. Programs would be provided data about adult-child interactions at their program and work with a coach to

co-create goals for improvement. With this new approach, there would be no minimum scores programs would have to meet to earn a certain Rating. Rather, programs would get credit toward their Rating simply for being observed and for setting improvement goals based on the results in collaboration with a coach. A variety of different adult-child observation tools could be offered, including the CLASS, the Child Home Early Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO), and the CHILD observation. See the table below for more information.

Observation Tool Name and Link	Description
Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS)	Support early educators to improve quality related to child-adult interactions in three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support.
Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO Pre-k) Child/Home Early Language and Literacy Observation Tool (CHELLO)	Supports use of quality literacy teaching practices. There are two separate tools, one for observation in preschool classrooms, and another one for use in home-based family child care settings.
Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning and Development (CHILD) Observation Tool	Supports early educators to the social and emotional climate of early care and education settings, such as warmth and friendship, a child-centered pedagogy, equitable treatment of children, and a focus on fostering children’s holistic development.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change, and specifically the idea of having both centers and family child care providers receive observations and offering programs their choice of which tool to use?
- b. From the table above, which tools or types of tools are you most interested in using if this option is provided? What kind of information or support would you need to make an informed choice about which tool to use to set goals for improvement?
- c. What else would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 7 (Optional): Supporting early educators’ and administrators’ growth and learning through training customized to meet their professional goals.

Current: Programs participating in Parent Aware earn points toward their desired Rating when early educators and administrators have degrees, credentials, training, and other types of professional development. All family child care providers and lead teachers in child care centers are required to complete a certain number of training hours within the past five years in five Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) content areas. To earn a Three- or Four-Star Rating, for example, lead teachers must earn a total of 50 training hours in the past five years, with 10 hours in each of five KCF areas. (You can read more about Parent Aware’s current training hour requirements [here](#).)

Problem: Child care centers experience barriers to finding and retaining staff with degrees and training. Family child care providers and early educators experience barriers obtaining degrees, credentials, and completing training hours required by Parent Aware, especially related to cost and lack of time (i.e., a center teacher may be hired shortly before the Parent Aware Rating application is due and there isn't enough time for the teacher to complete all the required trainings before the application deadline).

Idea: Shift the emphasis to supporting early educators and administrators with customized professional development plans to help them meet professional goals for themselves and for their programs that are set in collaboration with a professional development advisor and a coach. Early educators working in Parent Aware programs could meet requirements for professional development and training by having or completing a higher education degree, having a teaching license, OR completing 10 hours of training per year in an expanded number of KCF areas. Early educators would work with a professional development advisor to develop a professional development plan that includes plans to work toward a higher education degree, credential, or on-going training hours as well as to receive any additional support needed from a coach, mentor, or other resources. Hours spent with a coach or mentor would also count as training hours.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 8 (Optional): Supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being.

Current: Parent Aware does not currently have indicators on this topic.

Problem: The level of staff turnover in early care and education settings is too high. Children do better when their child care and early education programs are stable and they have time to develop close emotional connections with their early educators. Early educators and administrators do better when they have stable jobs, with positive work environments that offer equitable compensation.

Idea: Early educators and administrators would assess their work environments using the Model Work Standards provided by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. There are separate standards available for center-based and family child care settings. The Model Work Standards tool acknowledges that the needs of children and the needs of their providers are interconnected. Using the results from this tool, programs would work with their coach to co-create goals, including at least one goal related to improving the working environment and at least one goal related to wages and benefits. Any goal related to wages and benefits would be unique for center-based programs compared to family child care programs because they have very different operating structures and expenditures. Coaches would be well versed in supporting early educators to apply for a REETAIN bonus, and, for eligible programs, to apply for additional monthly compensation through the Great Start Compensation program (a program funded by the Minnesota Legislature where centers and family child care

providers can receive a monthly payment in which the explicit purpose is to increase the compensation and benefits of early childhood educators).

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 9 (Optional): Supportive behavior guidance practices.

Current: Parent Aware does not have indicators related to behavior guidance. Child care programs are referred to the Center for Inclusive Child Care and Mental Health Consultation for help with behavior guidance.

Problem: Too many young children are suspended or expelled from child care and early education settings, and research shows this occurs more often to children of color, those who speak a language other than English, and those who have special needs.

Idea: Parent Aware could promote programs' use of trauma-informed, positive behavior guidance rather than exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion. Programs would be supported to have written policies related to using positive guidance practices. The policy would include methods for promoting positive child, staff and family relationships; strategies supporting positive behavior and peer interactions; and supports for children and staff. The policy would include a way to support families to move to a different setting if it is determined, in partnership with the family, that a child care setting is not able to meet a child's needs. Access to training on positive behavior guidance and trauma-informed care, along with coaching and mental health consultation to help administrators and early educators use positive behavior guidance practices, would be widely available.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Topic 10 (Optional): Provide more search options on the Parent Aware website to allow families to search for things that make programs unique.

Current: The Parent Aware website is designed to encourage families to prioritize Star Ratings in their search for child care and early education programs for their children, with a small number of additional search criteria to help them narrow their search. Programs can share things that are unique about them in their philosophy

statement, but families cannot search in a way that allows them to easily find programs using the information in the philosophy statement.

Problem: Quality can mean different things to different families, depending on their children’s needs. Parent Aware does not currently offer a wide variety of search criteria that would help families find programs that meet their unique needs.

Idea: Parent Aware could offer ways for child care and early education programs to provide more information about their programs in a way that is searchable for families. For example, families with children with special needs may be interested in searching for programs with early educators with training or education specifically on serving children with special needs. Or they may wish to find programs using a particular curriculum, or that spend significant amounts of time outdoors each day. Programs with these characteristics would share this information in the Parent Aware application process, and the Parent Aware website would allow families to include these features in the search criteria they select.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. If this feature is offered, are there search criteria you would want to make sure are offered?
- c. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- d. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

Appendix II: Overview of proposed changes

The following content is the handout from second engagement process.

Overview of Proposed Changes

The proposed changes are new, and we are asking for your feedback because the state has the opportunity to revise and improve them before making any final decisions. **You might have more questions after reading this document, and that's OK!** If you are participating in a group session to discuss these ideas or completing the public survey to share your feedback, please feel free to mention any additional questions you have or information that could impact your opinion about the proposed change. (For example, you could say *"I think this change could work well if this [decision/process/detail] is [blank], but I'd have concerns if it was [blank]."*)

- **If you only have 5-10 minutes and want a high-level summary of the proposed changes**, start with these two sections:
 - A Revised Framework for Quality: This section provides an overview of proposed changes to the framework Parent Aware uses to define quality in early care and education settings.
 - The Quality Recognition Process: This section outlines ideas to revise the Rating process to recognize programs' achievements while also supporting them in a continuous process of quality improvement
- **If you have 15 minutes or more and want more details about the proposed changes**, start with the sections mentioned above and then review this section:
 - Draft Parent Aware Quality Practices: This section includes a draft set of revised quality indicators (aka "quality practices") with versions tailored to family child care and center-based programs.

A Revised Framework for Quality

How does Parent Aware define quality now?

Parent Aware defines quality in early care and education (ECE) settings by awarding programs a One-to Four-Star Rating. Star Ratings are determined by a program's ability to meet quality indicators within five categories of program standards:

1. Health and Well-being
2. Teaching and Relationships with Children
3. Relationships with Families
4. Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child
5. Professionalism

To achieve a rating, programs must submit documentation outlining how they are meeting the required quality indicator for that rating level. More information about Parent Aware's current quality indicators and evidence

requirements for programs can be found in the [Parent Aware Rating Guide: Full-Rating Pathway Quality Documentation Portfolio](#).

Why are changes needed?

In late 2023, the state engaged stakeholders from across the state—including child care providers, families, coaches, trainers, researchers, and advocates—to gather feedback on Parent Aware’s current standards and indicators for defining quality in ECE settings. To see the full report summarizing the findings from this engagement, click [here](#).

Based on feedback shared during this engagement as well as past surveys of providers and other stakeholders about their experiences with Parent Aware, the state is proposing a new framework for Parent Aware to better align with the needs and experiences of the community.

What is the proposed new framework for quality?

The new framework is designed to focus on people, their experiences, and what they need to be successful. One way to accomplish this could be to collapse Parent Aware’s five current categories of program standards into three categories focused on the quality practices that benefit the three groups of people most impacted by Parent Aware: children, families, and early educators. Positive, supportive experiences of families and early educators are essential ingredients needed to create optimal experiences for children, and the new framework was designed to highlight the importance and interconnectedness of those relationships. The new framework also leverages the themes found from public engagement about how Minnesotans define quality, with the elements of quality falling into two groupings: growth and learning, and well-being.

The table below provides an overview of the proposed new framework.

Quality Standard Categories	Theme: Growth and Learning	Theme: Well-being
Children	Children do better when early educators are caring and engaging, provide accessible learning environments where children can actively explore and learn, offer play-based, culturally affirming activities that build on interests and prior learning, and transitions are supported. These practices help build relationships and give children what they need to learn and grow.	Children do better when their settings are safe and healthy, and they are provided with nutritious meals and snacks, supported by adults to understand, and express their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and have opportunities for active play both indoors and outdoors. They also need settings that are trauma-informed and meet their needs in the context of their abilities, cultures and languages.
Families	Families do better when they have strong, positive relationships with program administrators/business owners and early educators, with knowledge that their strengths, languages, cultures, and goals for their children are respected and celebrated.	Families do better when they are connected with services in their community based on family's strengths, resources, priorities and concerns.
Early Educators	Early educators do better when they have and are working toward increased knowledge and skills needed to offer warm, welcoming, culturally, linguistically and ability affirming environments that meet children where they are and help them grow and learn in ways that build on prior learning.	Early educators do better when their jobs are rewarding, well-compensated careers that contribute to a reduction in turnover, and the stability of their program or business.

The Quality Recognition Process

How does Parent Aware currently determine Star Ratings?

Parent Aware currently uses Star Ratings (One-Star through Four-Star) to recognize programs for meeting quality indicators. To earn a higher Star Rating, programs submit a portfolio of evidence demonstrating how they meet the quality indicators required for that Rating level. A Parent Aware Rater reviews their portfolio to confirm the program meets requirements for the relevant indicators and then awards a Rating accordingly.

What are the challenges with the current Rating process?

Child care programs spend considerable time documenting and uploading the evidence to meet Parent Aware indicators of quality, and this time could be spent working with a coach assessing current practices and improving practices that benefit children, families, and their staff. Some programs have also shared that the Ratings process can feel stressful and high stakes. Additionally, terms like “indicators” and “Ratings” are abstract and can make the rating process feel stressful for programs.

What could a different process look like?

Parent Aware could revise its processes to focus more on recognizing programs’ strengths and emphasize continuous quality improvement over Ratings. One way to accomplish this could be to revise some of the language and processes Parent Aware uses. For example, Parent Aware could drop the term “Ratings” and instead call them “Quality Recognition Levels.” And, instead of a complex set of “quality indicators” that programs have to submit extensive evidence for, Parent Aware could offer a simplified set of “quality practices” that programs will be supported to work toward with fewer and more flexible evidence requirements. The goal of these changes would be to support programs wherever they are in their quality improvement journey, while still including Recognition Levels to recognize and provide information to families about programs’ strengths.

The new Quality Recognition Levels could have the following meanings:

Recognition Level One = Maintaining Health and Safety

- Programs at level one are licensed and in good standing with the state or Tribal government.

Recognition Level Two = Reflecting on Quality

- Programs at level two are in the process of working with a coach to assess if they are currently implementing quality practices that go beyond Licensing and are setting goals for improvement in an action plan.

Recognition Level Three = Enhancing Quality

- Programs at level three are using quality practices, have an action plan with goals for improvement, and have been using the process of quality improvement with coach support for six to twelve months, with progress made on at least three goals to improve implementation of quality practices.

Recognition Level Four = Implementing Quality

- Programs at level four are using quality practices, have an action plan with goals for improvement, and have been using the process of quality improvement with coach support for more than one year, with progress made on at least three goals per year to improve implementation of quality practices.

More information about the new proposed quality practices is included in the next section.

Draft Parent Aware Quality Practices

As described above, one proposed change to Parent Aware is to revise the “quality practices” (currently called “quality indicators”) to reflect feedback received from stakeholders about Parent Aware’s existing quality standards and indicators. These quality practices would be organized into three categories: children, families, and early educators, with some practices focused on growth and learning for each group, and others focused on well-being.

In past engagement efforts, the state has heard from providers that current language and framing for standards and indicators in Parent Aware does not feel relevant to all program types. The draft quality practices continue to be broadly consistent across program types, while using terms appropriate to each type of setting.

The proposed quality practices are included in the table below:

Parent Aware Category & Theme	Quality Practices for Family Child Care Providers	Quality Practices for Center-based Settings
Children: Growth and Learning	<p>1.1 Curriculum. Provider uses curriculum, written lesson plans, and daily routines to plan play-based activities, meet children where they are and help them grow, addressing all domains in the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress.</p> <p>1.2 Observation and assessment. Provider understands children’s needs through child observation and assessment, allowing them to plan activities that build on interests and prior learning.</p> <p>1.3 Affirming activities. Provider uses their knowledge of each child and their families to make sure activities reflect the lives, abilities, and cultures of each child.</p>	<p>1.1 Curriculum. Early educators use curriculum, written lesson plans, and daily routines to plan play-based activities that meet children where they are and help them grow, addressing all domains in the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress.</p> <p>1.2 Observation and assessment. Early educators understand children’s needs through child observation and assessment, allowing them to plan activities that build on interests and prior learning.</p> <p>1.3 Affirming activities. Early educators use their knowledge of each child and their families to make sure activities reflect the lives, abilities, and cultures of each child.</p>
Children: Growth and Learning	<p>2.1 Interactions. Provider positively interacts with children, in settings that are organized, warm, engaging and are sensitive to the importance of transitions.</p>	<p>2.1 Interactions. Early educators positively interact with children, in settings that are organized, warm, engaging and are sensitive to the importance of transitions.</p>

Parent Aware Category & Theme	Quality Practices for Family Child Care Providers	Quality Practices for Center-based Settings
Children: Well-being	3.1 Supportive guidance. Provider uses trauma-informed, positive behavior guidance practices and does not use exclusionary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, as discipline.	3.1 Supportive guidance. Program administrators and early educators use trauma-informed, positive behavior guidance practices and do not use exclusionary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, as discipline.
Children: Well-being	4.1 Environment. Provider creates an inviting setting that includes toys and other classroom materials selected intentionally for the ages and developmental levels of the children served. The provider uses program observation tools alongside tools to explore options to ensure the setting is accessible, culturally, and linguistically responsive and trauma informed.	4.1 Environment. Early educators create inviting settings that includes toys and other classroom materials selected intentionally for the ages and developmental levels of the children in their classrooms. Early educators use classroom observation tools to explore options to ensure the setting is accessible, culturally, and linguistically responsive, and trauma informed.
Children: Well-being	5.1 Health and safety. Provider maintains compliance with state or Tribal licensing requirements, offers healthy meals and snacks, and opportunities for active play both outdoors and indoors.	5.1 Health and safety. Program leaders and early educators maintain compliance with state and or Tribal licensing requirements, offer healthy meals and snacks, and offer opportunities for active play both indoors and outdoors.
Families: Growth and Learning	6.1 Family communication. Provider has regular, supportive two-way communication with families to learn about their strengths, languages, cultures and goals for their children, and involves them in the program in ways that include opportunities to provide input.	6.1 Family communication. Program leaders and early educators have regular, supportive two-way communication with families to learn about their strengths, languages, cultures and goals for their children, and involves them in the program in ways that include opportunities to provide input.
Families: Well-being	7.1 Community services. Provider talks to families about their needs and connects them to services available in their communities, including health, social services, and early childhood special education.	7.1 Community services. Program administrators and early educators talk to families about their needs and connect them to services available in their communities, including health, social services, and early childhood special education.
Early Educators: Growth and Learning	8.1 Professional development. Professional development. Provider has a professional development plan with training and education goals that are customized to meet	8.1 Professional development. Program administrators and early educators have professional development plans with training and education goals that are

Parent Aware Category & Theme	Quality Practices for Family Child Care Providers	Quality Practices for Center-based Settings
	<p>their individual training and education needs. Professional development plans must include coaching using a tool that assesses child-adult interactions, and steps toward achieving a credential (Step 6 or higher on the Minnesota career lattice).</p> <p>Provider must have or do one of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Have a Bachelor’s degree or higher related to early care and education, or 2) Be enrolled in a higher education degree program related to early care and education, or 3) Have a current age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license, or 4) Take at least 10 hours of approved training annually related to the goals in their program's quality improvement plan in one of the following KCF areas: I: Child Development and Learning, II: Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences, III: Relationships with Families, IV: Assessment, Evaluation and Individualization, IX: Trauma Informed Care and Practice, X: Working with Multilingual Preschoolers and their Families. 	<p>customized to meet their individual training and education needs. Professional development plans for early educators must include coaching using a tool that assesses child-adult interactions, and steps toward achieving a credential (Step 6 or higher on the Minnesota career lattice).</p> <p>Early educators must have or do one of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a Bachelor’s degree or higher related to early care and education, or 2. Be enrolled in a higher education degree program related to early care and education, or 3. Have a current age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license, or 4. Take at least 10 hours of approved training annually related to the goals in their program's quality improvement plan in one or more of the following KCF areas: I: Child Development and Learning, II: Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences, III: Relationships with Families, IV: Assessment, Evaluation and Individualization, IX: Trauma Informed Care and Practice, X: Working with Multilingual Preschoolers and their Families.
Early Educators: Growth and Learning	9.1 Work environment. Providers assess their work environment, consider where to focus improvement efforts, and create a plan for improvement.	9.1 Work environment. Program administrators and early educators assess their work environment, discuss options, co-create goals and a plan for improvement.