

Parent Aware Policy Update

February 2020

Changes to Parent Aware Grant policies

- Starting July 1, Parent Aware Grant amounts will be tiered based on star ratings, and programs earning four-star ratings will be eligible for the grants.
- Going forward, rated programs that apply to be re-rated in advance of their current rating expiration date will only be eligible for grants if they earn a higher star rating level than they currently have.
- Expanding the availability of Parent Aware Grants supports access to high quality child care for families with low incomes and expands parental choice.

Background

Parent Aware is Minnesota’s quality rating and improvement system, which provides quality ratings to child care and early education programs based on a one- to four-star scale. These ratings, shared on [ParentAware.org](https://parentaware.org), provide information to families, encouraging them to consider higher rated programs when searching for a child care and early education program for their children. Parent Aware also provides a common set of best practices for child care and early education, and offers supports to help programs work toward best practices. This allows them to evaluate the quality of their programs, and make targeted improvements to better support child development and learning.

To increase quality, programs need coaching support, professional development, time to improve program practices and funds to implement changes to achieve a higher star rating. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has previously directed its limited funds toward assisting programs to move to a higher rating as well as offering an incentive for programs to join Parent Aware if they earned a one-, two- or three-star rating. Four-star rated programs were eligible for other benefits such as Early Learning Scholarships and higher Child Care Assistance Program reimbursements, but not for Parent Aware Grant awards.

The department relies on the voices of providers and partners – as well as data – to determine where to make improvements. This input and information have made clear that the policies enacted at the start of Parent Aware were no longer having the intended impact. As Parent Aware started the fourth year of statewide implementation, data and comments from [the most recent Provider Perceptions survey](#) indicated programs were choosing to earn lower ratings to receive grants over the other benefits for four-star rated programs.

Stakeholder engagement

From September through November 2019, the department sought input from stakeholders on potential changes to Parent Aware Grant policies through a series of engagement events and an online survey of child care providers serving children receiving child care assistance. All stakeholders responded to the following questions generated by the department in response to provider and partner feedback:

- Should four-star rated licensed child care programs, either through the accelerated pathway (due to accreditation) or full-rating pathway, be eligible to receive quality grants?
- Should programs be allowed to re-rate early and earn a grant if they do not earn a higher star rating level?
- Should grant awards be tiered by star rating level? For example, should a one-star rated program earn less than a two-star rated program?

New rates effective 2021

Based on the feedback received during the stakeholder engagement process and funds available, the department will start implementing the new policies for Parent Aware Grants effective July 1, 2020, with grant awards effective Jan. 1, 2021.

New Parent Aware Grant award amounts for licensed child care programs will be:

Parent Aware rating	One-star	Two-star	Three-star	Four-star
Full-rating pathway	\$1,500	\$2,000	\$3,500	\$4,000
Expedited pathway	N/A	N/A	\$3,500	\$4,000
Accelerated pathway	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$2,000

For four-star licensed child care programs in all three pathways, grants will be processed in the quality support cohort after the rating is earned.

The new grants for programs that earn a four-star rating recognize and support child care programs with financial resources to maintain high quality, improve the validity of Parent Aware ratings, support access to high quality child care for families with low incomes, and expand parental choice.

This policy change is funded with federal Child Care and Development Block Grant quality funds.