

Board of Directors

Michael V. Ciresi, Chair

Partner
Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P.

Douglas M. Baker, Jr., Vice Chair

Chairman and CEO
Ecolab

Jan Kruchoski, Treasurer

Principal
CliftonLarsonAllen LLP

Tim Penny, Secretary

President
Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

Carol Barnett

Chief Commercial Officer
Anika Therapeutics, Inc.

Mary Brainerd

President and CEO
HealthPartners

Kenneth Burdick

Maryellen Coughlan, M.Ed

Director of New Initiatives
Capstone Publishers

Lynn Haglin

Vice President/KidsPlus Director
Northland Foundation

Robbin Johnson

President
Cargill Foundation

Scott Jones

Chair
Jones Family Foundation

Peter J. McDonald

Vice President, Corporate Strategy
General Mills

Arthur J. Rolnick

Senior Fellow
Humphrey School of Public Affairs

Fred Senn

Founding Partner
Fallon Worldwide

Warren Staley

Retired Chairman and CEO
Cargill

February 10, 2013

Dear Stakeholders:

One of Parent Aware for School Readiness' (PASR's) most important roles is that of watchdog, protecting the integrity of the Parent Aware ratings to ensure they stay strong and improve over time. Funding Child Trends, a non-profit, non-partisan research center, to conduct an annual evaluation of Parent Aware, in partnership with Greater Twin Cities United Way, is a critical component of this function. Thus, I am pleased to share the attached report: *Evaluation of Parent Aware: Minnesota's Quality Rating & Improvement System - Year 1 Implementation Report*.

Where We Are

It is fair to say that the statewide rollout of Parent Aware, supported by the State of Minnesota and the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant to Minnesota, as well as other public and private partners, is the most sweeping change ever made to Minnesota's early learning system. Parent Aware isn't a program or an intervention – it's a comprehensive framework that every early learning program in Minnesota can use to voluntarily assess their school readiness quality. At the same time, it provides invaluable information that every parent in Minnesota can use when shopping for a quality early learning program for his or her young child. This kind of seismic change doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen without commitment to a shared goal and a relentless focus on continuous improvement.

The attached Year 1 Report is intended primarily to provide the feedback to the Parent Aware implementation partners, both public and private, which share responsibility for making Parent Aware a success. Most of the data is qualitative, and must be read thoroughly to gain a full perspective. It's not a report that translates easily into sound bites or pithy summaries. This report focuses on the successes and challenges of implementation in 2012, and highlights where there is opportunity for improvement.

Where We Need To Go

Increasing Incentive for Rating: In the Race to the Top Plan, Minnesota put forward very aggressive Parent Aware participation targets. While the total number of programs with Ratings at the end of 2012 was on target, the very small number of programs going through the full Rating process is of great concern. Direct incentives to programs (quality grants, coaching), as well as generation of

demand-side pressure from parents using ratings (radio and internet ads, marketing kits) must be increased in 2013.

Communicate: There is a need to communicate clearly and positively with providers about the process and benefits of becoming rated. Parent Aware, as a voluntary QRIS, must earn the trust of providers by communicating clearly the expectations and benefits of Rating, as well as helping providers understand that Parent Aware is a system committed to improving over time. While it's understandable that programs may see changes to Parent Aware as shifting sand, we need to work together to set the expectation that Parent Aware *will* change over time, responding to lessons learned as it rolls out and increasing its rigorous commitment to measuring the facets of a program that relate to school readiness outcomes, as we learn more about those connections.

Be Accountable: To identify what is working and what is not, we all need good information. For everything from determining the impact of various types of quality improvement supports to drive policy and investment; to validating the connection between Ratings and children's school readiness, we need solid data. The State must continue investments in the next generation Parent Aware data system, focusing on creating a system with the flexibility to accommodate the changes that are inevitable as Parent Aware expands and improves over time.

Build a Strong Foundation: We need to continue efforts to build and strengthen linkages among the many public and private partners statewide that want to make Parent Aware a success. This requires a shared vision for where we're headed, and a willingness to stick with it through the bumps that accompany any change effort as ambitious as Parent Aware. Success will be more likely if opportunities for flexibility and innovation are built into the process, if collaborators are willing to listen and learn, and if evaluation and program data are used to improve the system over time.

For readers most interested in learning how the ratings are related to children's school readiness outcomes, I invite you to watch for the Year 2 report, which will look closely at the school readiness of a sample of children from a range of Parent Aware rated programs. Before we get to that point, though, there is much work to be done to make sure Minnesota's quality framework is strengthened in response to what we learned during Year 1.

Thanks

In closing, I'd like to thank our public and private partners in this important work: the Minnesota Departments of Human Services, Education and Health, the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network and all the local resource and referral agencies across Minnesota, the Greater Twin Cities United Way, all PASR's generous foundation and individual donors, and most importantly, the parents that use Ratings in their shopping and the early learning programs that demonstrated their commitment to quality by stepping in to Parent Aware during 2012. We appreciate your willingness to work together, while respecting that each of us has our own role to play in making Parent Aware successful. There are times when PASR's watchdog role creates friction – we wouldn't be doing our job if it didn't, and we appreciate our partners' willingness to listen and make changes when warranted.

We look forward to the rollout of Parent Aware to another fourteen counties in 2013, and building toward having Parent Aware available to every early learning program in Minnesota by 2015. Throughout that process, PASR is committed to promoting Parent Aware to parents statewide and partnering with other organizations to insure success while maintaining our unwavering focus on protecting the integrity of the Parent Aware ratings to insure that together, we're making sure all Minnesota children are ready for school success.

Sincerely,



Ericca Maas
Executive Director, Parent Aware for School Readiness



Evaluation of Parent Aware:

Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)



Year 1 Implementation Report
December, 2012



PARENT  AWARE
for **SCHOOL READINESS**



Statewide Expansion of Parent Aware: Year 1 Implementation Report

**Kathryn Tout
Rebecca Starr
Jennifer Cleveland
Sarah Friese
Margaret Soli
Ladia Albertson-Junkans**

December 2012

Acknowledgments: Funding for the Parent Aware evaluation is provided by Parent Aware for School Readiness and Greater Twin Cities United Way. Child Trends would like to thank the members of the Technical Work Group for the Parent Aware evaluation who provided feedback on the design and methods of the study and who reviewed the draft report. We also are grateful for the willingness of key Parent Aware informants to participate in interviews and share their experiences and perceptions with the evaluation team. They contributed valuable information that enriched the findings in the report.

The Parent Aware Evaluation at a Glance...

Parent Aware is Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The Parent Aware Evaluation is designed to provide information about the implementation and effectiveness of Parent Aware in promoting children's optimal development and school readiness through a two-pronged strategy that (1) provides information about early care and education program quality to parents and (2) supports quality improvement of early care and education programs.

Child Trends, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization is conducting the evaluation from 2012-2016. The Parent Aware Evaluation is funded by Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) and Greater Twin Cities United Way.

The evaluation addresses five primary research questions:

- **How is implementation proceeding?** Child Trends will study the *implementation* of Parent Aware, including the marketing campaigns and tools, quality improvement supports for programs, recruitment and retention of programs and the rating process. Perceptions of how Parent Aware is working for participants and families from the perspective of early care and education providers and Parent Aware staff will be collected through surveys and interviews.
- **Is quality improving in Parent Aware-rated programs?** Observations measuring the quality of the environment and teacher-child interactions will be conducted in rated programs to understand how program quality is changing over time and whether these changes are aligned with the Parent Aware indicators and ratings.
- **How is children's development related to Parent Aware ratings?** Children in observed classrooms will be recruited to participate in a fall and spring school readiness assessment aimed at measuring Kindergarten readiness patterns in four year-old children attending Parent Aware programs at all rating levels.
- **How effective are the quality indicators and rating structure used in Parent Aware?** Child Trends will conduct a *validation* of the Parent Aware indicators and rating structure and assess the extent to which Parent Aware is capturing program quality accurately and reliably.
- **How is Parent Aware contributing to Minnesota's early care and education system?** The evaluation will address the role of Parent Aware and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant in supporting Minnesota's early care and education system.

Three evaluation reports will be produced each year. The annual report will provide an overview of activities and outcomes while two brief reports will be produced in the first and third quarters to address high priority topical issues (such as quality improvement or a review of Parent Aware indicators).

Table of Contents

Overview and Purpose of the Report	7
Section 1. Description of Parent Aware and the Context for Implementation	9
The Parent Aware Rating Process	12
The Parent Aware Rating Tool.....	13
From Pilot to Statewide Roll-out.....	15
Recruitment for Parent Aware Statewide.....	15
Marketing of Parent Aware	16
Section 2. Program Participation and Ratings	18
Number of Current Parent Aware Ratings	18
Participation in Parent Aware.....	19
Ratings of Programs in Parent Aware	21
Summary of Participation and Ratings.....	22
Section 3. Early Implementation of Quality Improvement Supports in Parent Aware	24
Building Quality/Parent Aware Quality Improvement Supports	26
Grant funds administered in Building Quality	26
Rating goals of programs in Building Quality	27
Completion of Building Quality.....	27
Parent Aware-only Quality Improvement Supports.....	27
Grant funds administered by Parent Aware	29
Rating goals of programs in Parent Aware	29
Quality Coaches' and Professional Development Coordinators' Impressions and Experiences with Parent Aware	30
Work, Educational and Training Experiences.....	30
The Role of the Quality Coach.....	31
The Role of the Professional Development Coordinator	32
Coaching Model: Building Quality	32
Coaching Model: Parent Aware	38
Additional Implementation Features of Quality Improvement Services.....	41
Summary of Quality Improvement, Coaching and Coordinating in Building Quality/Parent Aware and Parent Aware-only	44
Section 4. Perceptions from Key Informants on Parent Aware Implementation	47
Purpose	47
Sample Description	48
Methodology	49
Recruitment Strategies	49
Rating Tool & Quality Indicators.....	52
Quality Assurance & Rating Process	56
Quality Improvement Supports	61
Incentives.....	63
Linkages with the Early Childhood System	71

Data & Technology	75
Expanding Parent Aware Statewide	77
Parent Aware in the Context of Minnesota’s Race to the Top—Early Learning Grant.....	82
Summary of Key Informant Perceptions of Parent Aware Implementation	86
Section 5. Summary and Implications	88
Appendix A: Data Sources	94
Appendix B: Coaching and PD Advising Forms and Tools	96
Appendix C: Glossary	98

Tables

Table 1. Currently rated programs by program type (from pilot and newly rated).....	19
Table 2. Currently rated programs by rating type/star level.....	22
Table 3. Grant funds by spending category for programs in the first cohort of Building Quality	26
Table 4. Star rating goals of programs in Building Quality	27
Table 5. Major coaching and coordinating activities for programs in Parent Aware-only	28
Table 6. Star rating goals of Parent Aware providers	29
Table 7. Terms used to describe the number of respondents expressing particular themes.....	30
Table 8. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage One	33
Table 9. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Two	34
Table 10. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Three	35
Table 11. Number of Quality Coaches (n=6) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Four	36
Table 12. Number of Quality Coaches (n=5) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Five.....	37
Table 13. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the major Parent Aware coaching activities at Stage One	39
Table 14. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Parent Aware coaching activities at Stage Two	39
Table 15. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Parent Aware coaching activities at Stage Three	40
Table 16. Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators’ answers to questions regarding supervision	43
Table 17. Terms used to describe the percentage of select respondents expressing particular themes.....	49

Figures

Figure 1. Parent Aware Coordination Structure	12
Figure 2. Plan for Parent Aware statewide Roll-Out: 2012-2015 (color indicates the year in which fully-rated programs are eligible to enroll in Parent Aware in counties across Minnesota. APR is currently available statewide.)	15
Figure 3. Percent of participating center-based and family child care programs eligible for Parent Aware by county	20
Figure 4. Percent of eligible center-based programs (excluding School-Based Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start programs) rated in Parent Aware by county as of November 15 th , 2012	21
Figure 5. Number of programs at each star level by program type	22

Overview and Purpose of the Report

Parent Aware is Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for early care and education. It existed as a pilot program from 2007 – 2011 and entered a statewide expansion phase in January, 2012. The purpose of Parent Aware is to promote children’s optimal development and school readiness through a two-pronged strategy that (1) provides information about early care and education program quality to parents and (2) supports quality improvement of early care and education programs. Parent Aware is distinct among QRIS nationally because of its explicit focus on supporting parents in their selection of early care and education arrangements for their young children; indeed, Parent Aware is the only QRIS that includes the term “parent” in its name.

Since its inception, evaluation has informed the planning, design, and implementation of Parent Aware. As Parent Aware shifts from a pilot to statewide expansion, evaluation will again play a role in tracking implementation successes and challenges, assessing the validity of the redesigned Parent Aware rating tool, understanding the effectiveness of quality improvement supports for programs and marketing tools for parents, and documenting the role of Parent Aware in supporting the overall objectives of Minnesota’s early care and education system. The Parent Aware evaluation will also contribute critical information to reports on Minnesota’s federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant awarded in December 2011.

The purpose of this report is to provide a descriptive portrait of Parent Aware in the first year of statewide expansion. It focuses primarily on features of implementation and serves as a baseline for subsequent evaluation reports to be produced over the next four years.¹ The report is organized in four sections with 2 appendices.

- Section 1 provides information about the context of Parent Aware implementation and details about the revised Parent Aware rating tool. It includes a brief description of the revisions to the Parent Aware standards and indicators and the role of Parent Aware in Minnesota’s RTT-ELC grant activities.
- Section 2 uses data from multiple sources to describe patterns of enrollment and program ratings in Parent Aware.
- Section 3 describes the implementation of quality improvement supports from the perspective of Quality Coaches and Professional Development Coordinators.
- Section 4 offers an in-depth analysis of Parent Aware implementation from the perspective of key informants. It describes key informants’ perceptions and experiences with issues such as recruitment, ratings, quality improvement, incentives, data and technology, linkages across the early childhood system and the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant.

¹ It is expected that the final evaluation report will be released in 2016.

- Section 5 provides a synthesis of findings across the report and a set of implications for how findings can be used to inform implementation and continuous quality improvement. This summary is supplemented by information from the Minnesota Department of Human Services that describes plans and new procedures being implemented in the second year of statewide expansion.

This is the first report produced from the evaluation of Parent Aware being conducted by Child Trends and funded by Parent Aware for School Readiness and Greater Twin Cities United Way.

Note on terminology used in the report: The terms “provider(s)” and “program(s)” are used to distinguish between the people and facilities in early care and education (ECE). Provider (or providers) refers to family child care providers, directors, teachers, curriculum coordinators or other people who make decisions and have specific knowledge and skills in ECE settings. Program (or programs) refers to facilities. This is a broad term that encompasses the personnel, environment, and materials in an ECE setting. ECE program, or simply program, is an inclusive, umbrella term that includes family child care programs, child care centers, School-Based Pre-Kindergarten programs, and Head Start programs. If specificity about program type is needed, the terms center-based programs (to refer to both child care centers and preschools), child care center, family child care program, school-based pre-kindergarten program and Head Start program are used. The terms used in the report reflect those used in Parent Aware materials and by the key informants interviewed for the evaluation.

Section 1. Description of Parent Aware and the Context for Implementation

Parent Aware began as a four-year pilot from 2007 – 2011. During the pilot, quality ratings from 1- to 4- stars were available to early care and education programs in Minneapolis, Saint Paul, the Wayzata school district, and Blue Earth and Nicollet counties. Accredited, Head Start, and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs in the seven-county metropolitan area were eligible for an automatic 4-star rating. By the end of the pilot, nearly 400 ECE programs had an active Parent Aware rating.²

In December 2011, Minnesota learned that it was the recipient of the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. Minnesota’s application scored 250.8 points, the 7th highest score among the 37 states that submitted applications.³ The award of the grant provides the primary context for Parent Aware as it moves from a pilot to a statewide system.

The central goal set forth in Minnesota’s RTT-ELC grant application is the intentional weaving of multiple public and private funds for early childhood services into a sustainable and high quality system that supports children’s development, particularly those living in poverty.

Parent Aware is described in the grant application as the “premiere strategy for improving learning outcomes for children” (Minnesota’s RTT-ELC grant application, p. 52). The RTT-ELC grant plan for Parent Aware highlights the supports for the selection and use of assessments in early care and education programs that can be used to guide individualized instruction and provide information in “real time” about children’s progress. The plan includes the provision of incentives and quality improvement supports that would encourage enrollment in Parent Aware, especially among programs serving children with high needs.⁴ The plan sets ambitious targets for Parent Aware enrollment (though some modifications have been made to the timing for meeting the targets). The grant application provides details about revisions to the Parent Aware standards and indicators (to include the domain of health and issues related to children with special needs) as well as the structure of the rating tool that are designed to improve its effectiveness (described in more detail below). In addition to supports for programs, the plan describes the provision of resources to move the early childhood workforce towards higher qualifications (including the Minnesota Child Care Credential and the National Child Development Associate Credential). As required by the RTT-ELC grant, Minnesota’s plan for Parent Aware also includes a schedule and framework for assessing (and revising) the Parent Aware indicators and for analyzing the validity of the Parent Aware rating tool.

² Detailed evaluation reports from each year of the pilot are available at http://www.pasrmn.org/MELF/Parent_Aware_Pilot_Research

³ See <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/applications/chart-of-scores.pdf> for details.

⁴ Children with high needs are defined in the RTT-ELC grant as children from low-income families or children with disabilities or developmental delays, who are English learners, who reside on Indian lands, who are migrant, homeless or in foster care, or have some other characteristics defined by the State (RTT-ELC grant application materials, page 14).

Other plans for grant activities include:

- Designation of Transformation Zones (called Target Communities in the grant application) in Minneapolis (the Northside Achievement Zone) and Saint Paul (the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood), Itasca County and the White Earth Reservation. The Transformation Zones are intended to serve as focal points for bringing together the grant activities. The grant provides additional resources to these Zones that can be layered on existing infrastructures to support young children.
- Distribution of Early Learning Scholarships that will provide access to high quality programs for children with high needs.
- Distribution of Title I matching grants that can be used by school districts in the Transformation Zones to improve or expand their pre-kindergarten programming.
- Creating pathways for family, friend and neighbor caregivers to become licensed.
- Revising and piloting of a kindergarten entry assessment.
- Development of data linkages across statewide systems.

The RTT-ELC grant is managed by the Office of Early Learning which brings together staff from the Minnesota Departments of Education, Human Services and Health. The Minnesota Department of Education serves as the lead agency for the grant.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has primary responsibility for administration of Parent Aware. DHS contracts with the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network⁵ (the Network) to manage and coordinate Parent Aware recruitment, quality improvement services, and communications. Local child care resource and referral agencies conduct recruitment and offer the services of Quality Coaches and Professional Development Coordinators to center-based programs and family child care programs. The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota is contracted to conduct observations for select programs seeking ratings. All information to determine ratings for center-based programs and family child care programs (including accredited child care centers, preschools and family child care programs) is sent to DHS for final designation of ratings. All information to determine ratings for School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs and for Head Start programs is sent to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Implementation of Parent Aware involves several additional partners:

- Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to “promote and protect” Parent Aware ratings by supporting marketing and communications activities and by funding evaluation.
- Greater Twin Cities United Way supports the Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) at the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC). AFP provides consultation, training, support and reimbursement of fees for programs located

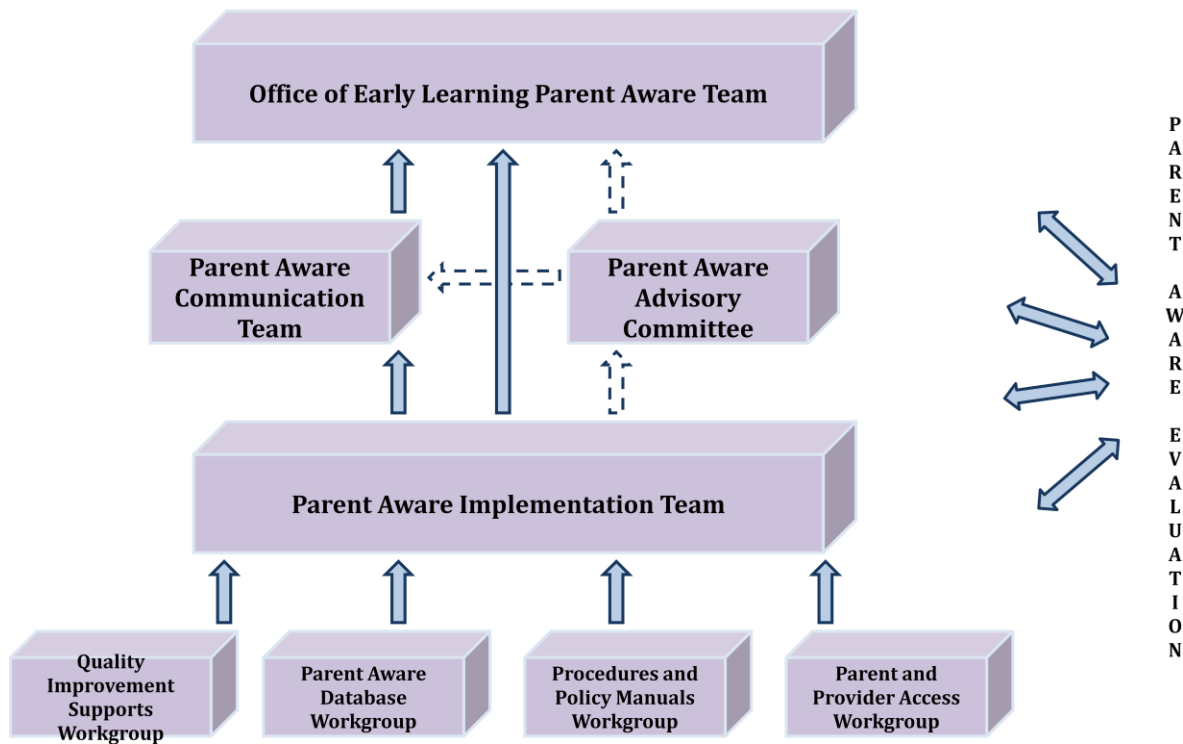
⁵ On January 1, 2013 the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network changed its name to Child Care Aware of Minnesota. For the purpose of this report, the term Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R) is used.

in the Twin Cities' nine-county metropolitan area seeking national accreditation. Programs with national accreditation are eligible for the Accelerated Pathways to Rating in Parent Aware.

- The Minnesota Center for Professional Development (MNCPD) Registry houses provider-level information about qualifications, credentials, training and employment for providers in licensed programs. The information entered by providers and verified by the Registry is used to create a Learning Record for each provider and to designate the provider's step on the Career Lattice (which is used in the rating process). Enrollment in the Professional Development (PD) Registry is a requirement for all licensed family child care providers and teachers employed at a program seeking a rating. The PD Registry is available to teachers in School Based Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start programs), but enrollment is not a requirement for their Parent Aware rating.

Implementation of Parent Aware is supported by a structure of teams, committees and workgroups that carry out the daily work and responsibilities of Parent Aware (See Figure 1). They also convene at regular intervals to discuss emerging issues, review information about implementation, problem-solve and strategize about next steps. The Office of Early Learning Parent Aware Team has primary oversight for Parent Aware. They receive input from a Parent Aware Advisory Committee as well as the Communications Workgroup. Additional Workgroups include: Quality Improvement Supports, Database, Policies and Procedures, and Parent and Provider Access. These workgroups report to a Parent Aware Implementation Team that meets bi-monthly and reports to the Office of Early Learning Parent Aware Team. The Parent Aware Evaluation is intended to provide data and information that can support implementation, decision-making and continuous quality improvement at all levels

Figure 1. Parent Aware Coordination Structure



Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services, Parent Aware Coordination Structure, 2012

In the remainder of this section, implementation details are provided about the Parent Aware Rating Process, the Rating Tool, statewide roll out of Parent Aware, recruitment and marketing. Quality improvement supports are covered briefly in the description of the rating process but are covered in further depth in Section 3 of the report.

The Parent Aware Rating Process

Programs that are interested in Parent Aware have different options for enrollment to receive a *full Parent Aware rating*. Programs that did not participate in the Parent Aware pilot and that serve children with high needs are eligible to enroll in Building Quality, a pre-rating support process that offers the services of a Quality Coach, a Professional Development Coordinator that assists with professional development planning, quality improvement funds (\$500), and access to low-cost training. Building Quality is a 6-month process that prepares programs for entering Parent Aware.

Programs not eligible for Building Quality supports enroll directly into Parent Aware. These programs still receive support from a Quality Coach and a Professional Development Coordinator, but it is a less intensive model of support than what is received through Building Quality. For example, Quality Coaches will provide technical assistance to help programs complete the documentation needed for the Parent Aware rating. These programs also have access to low-cost trainings.

After receiving a full rating, programs that receive a 1- 2- or 3-star rating receive a \$1000 grant. This grant is eligible to programs regardless of whether they participated in Building Quality. Issuing a grant to 1-, 2-, or 3-star rated programs is intended to encourage programs to continue their quality improvement process.

Programs enter Parent Aware at two time-points each year in groupings called “cohorts”. One cohort begins in January, and one cohort begins in July. The process from the time of enrollment to the time of a ratings designation takes approximately six months.

Nationally accredited child care centers, preschools, and family child care programs as well as Head Start and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs enter Parent Aware via the Accelerated Pathways to Rating (APR). Programs seeking an APR rating can enroll in Parent Aware on a rolling basis (which is distinct from the cohort enrollment approach used for full ratings). APR programs have a streamlined process to achieve a 4-star rating once they demonstrate that their curriculum tool aligns with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. APR programs must also demonstrate that they use an approved assessment tool or must submit their assessment tool for approval. All lead teachers in APR programs must document that they have achieved 8 hours of curriculum training as well as 8 hours of training on the approved assessment tool. APR programs do not have access to the quality improvement supports available to programs that receive a full rating. However, APR programs do have access to low-cost trainings, similar to fully-rated programs and they do have access to technical assistance from MDE (for School Based Pre-Kindergarten program and Head Start programs) or from the CCR&R System (for accredited center-based programs and family child care programs). Accredited center-based programs can receive additional support through the Accreditation Facilitation Project.

The Parent Aware Rating Tool

The revised Parent Aware rating tool uses a “hybrid” structure that incorporates elements of a “building block” and “points” structure used in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems across the country. In Parent Aware, programs seeking a full rating must meet all of the indicators at the first star level (or block) in order to earn a 1-star rating. To reach 2-stars, programs must also meet all of the indicators at the 2-star level (or block). Programs must meet all indicators at the 1- and 2-star levels before they can apply for a 3- or 4-star rating. To earn 3- or 4-stars, programs must earn points on additional indicators. The number of points earned determines whether a program achieves 3- or 4-stars.

Parent Aware indicators are grouped into four categories:

1. Physical health and well-being
2. Teaching and relationships
3. Assessment of child progress
4. Teacher training and education

The quality indicators in these categories are nearly identical for family child care programs and center-based programs. Major differences in indicators across the two program types are noted below in the teaching and relationships category and the teacher training and education category.

Physical health and well-being. The physical health and well-being category includes indicators for providing families with contact information for developmental, vision, dental, hearing, and social/emotional screenings, mental health, and special education (at 1-star) and for family services such as the Child Care Assistance Program or public health services (at 2-stars). The 2-star level also requires a self-assessment of the environment and goal setting for the program.⁶ To earn 3- or 4-stars, programs must meet additional physical health and well-being indicators such as providing additional assistance to help families get the supports they need, participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and teacher training on child nutrition and obesity prevention.

Teaching and relationships. To earn 1 star in the teaching and relationships category, programs must provide families with contact information for local family education options, such as Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and lead teachers and family child care providers must complete 8 hours of training in child development. For 2-stars, programs must hold an orientation for new families and discuss preferences including family traditions. Programs must also use lesson plans and a daily schedule. Lead teachers and family child care providers must have 8 hours of training on the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). To earn 3- or 4-stars in teaching and relationships, programs must meet additional indicators such as using a curriculum aligned with the ECIPs (including lead teacher/family child care training on the curriculum), lead teacher/family child care provider training or coaching on special needs or child development, and the ability to communicate with parents in their primary language. Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations are required for center-based programs with preschool classrooms to reach star levels three or four.

Assessment of child progress. For assessment of child progress, lead teachers/family child care providers must complete two hours of training on authentic observation practices. Programs must observe children regularly and record information monthly to earn one star. For 2-stars, programs must share the authentic observation summaries with families. To earn 3- or 4-stars in assessment of child progress, programs conduct child assessments with an approved tool and lead teachers/family child care providers are trained on the assessment tool. Points can also be earned for providing families with child assessment results and using child assessment information to guide lessons and individual goals for children.

Teacher training and education. To earn 1 star, lead teachers/family child care providers must submit training and professional development credentials in the MNCPD Registry. At the 2-star level, lead teachers/family child care providers must have professional development plans. Points to reach 3- or 4-stars are earned by the education level of the director (for center-based programs only) and by teachers'/family child care provider's level on the Career Lattice (the average level is used for center-based programs).⁷

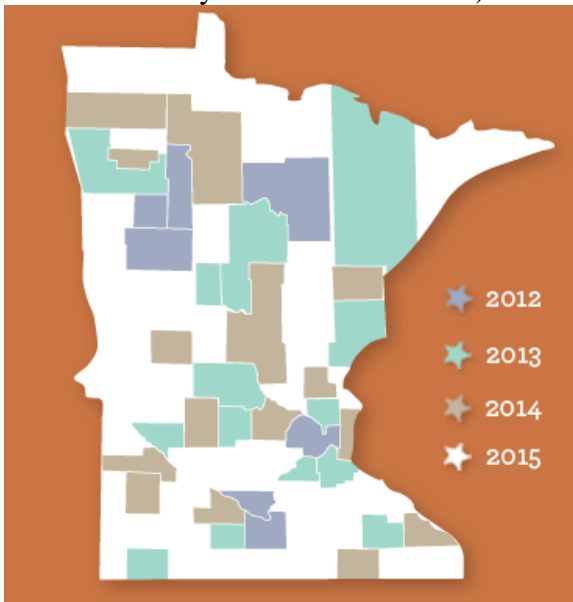
⁶ Future evaluation reports planned for 2013 will review the self-assessment tool used in Parent Aware.

⁷ Complete descriptions of the Parent Aware indicators and the requirements for APR programs are available at www.parentawareratings.org.

From Pilot to Statewide Roll-out

The Parent Aware statewide roll-out began in early 2012, with the first cohort of programs beginning in March. In 2012, Parent Aware became available to early care and education programs eligible for the full rating and Building Quality tracks in the pilot areas as well as the rest of Hennepin and Ramsey counties, and in Becker, Clearwater, Mahnomon, and Itasca counties. These areas include a focus on the four Transformation Zones: White Earth Reservation, which includes Mahnomon county and parts of Becker and Clearwater counties, Itasca County, Saint Paul's Promise Neighborhood, and the Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis. In 2012, Parent Aware also became available statewide to programs eligible for Accelerated Pathways to Rating. Parent Aware will be available for all rating pathways statewide by 2015 (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Plan for Parent Aware statewide Roll-Out: 2012-2015 (color indicates the year in which fully-rated programs are eligible to enroll in Parent Aware in counties across Minnesota. APR is currently available statewide.)



Source: Downloaded from www.parentawareratings.org, November, 2012

Recruitment for Parent Aware Statewide

Recruitment for Parent Aware differs by program type. Head Start and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs are recruited by the Minnesota Department of Education, typically by reaching out to programs via telephone and mail. To help streamline the application process, MDE has included the Parent Aware application materials along with other forms that Head Start and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs are already required to complete. The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) System is responsible for recruitment of center-based program and family child care programs seeking a full rating (whether or not they receive Building Quality supports) and accredited center-based programs and family child care programs seeking Accelerated Pathways to Rating. Accredited programs participating in

the Accreditation Facilitation Project are recruited into Parent Aware by the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children.⁸

A variety of recruitment strategies are used with programs. For example, the CCR&R System uses email, phone calls, and marketing through mailings, newsletters, banners, social media, and other websites. Other recruitment strategies have included information sessions, Parent Aware orientations, other meetings, presentations, and visits to programs. Word of mouth and information presented through trusted relationships (i.e. with a Professional Development Coordinators) also are used with some programs.

For programs in which the provider is an English Language Learner, Think Small outreach staff conduct the primary recruitment.⁹ Fliers and videos have been translated to aid in recruitment of these programs. Translation services may also be used during information and orientation sessions. For ELL providers outside of the Think Small region, Think Small does provide a language (phone) line translation service available to providers if no interpreter exists within their local Resource and Referral Agency as only some CCR&R regions in greater Minnesota have a part-time outreach staff person or may be part of a larger organization (CAP Agency) that offers translation and interpretation services.

Marketing of Parent Aware

Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) and the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network lead the communications and marketing efforts for Parent Aware.

The Parent Aware website is the primary marketing tool that has been used so far in implementation. Other online information has been available on the Network website and through a digital ad campaign (more details below). Print methods, including brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, and newspaper articles and advertisements, have also been used. Staff at Child Care Resource and Referral agencies talk about Parent Aware with parents during referrals. Marketing kits are given to participating programs which include banners, window clings, and cubby hangers.

Primary messages to parents first communicate the importance of school readiness and the urgency of preparing their child for Kindergarten, and then proceed to explain the ratings and how they are a useful tool for parents. The messaging of Parent Aware was informed by a baseline survey of Minnesota parents in September 2012. The purpose of the survey was to inform the PASR campaign strategy and Parent Aware implementation strategy and evaluate the effectiveness of the PASR campaign and Parent Aware implementation work. Follow-up surveys will be conducted in future years to gauge trends, measure effectiveness and inform adjustments.

⁸ The Accreditation Facilitation Project plans to recruit 350 child care centers in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. These programs are not expected to enroll in Parent Aware until after they have achieved accreditation status (which may take up to two years.) This delay may affect Parent Aware's ability to recruit child care centers in the metro area in the short-term.

⁹ Think Small is a child care resource and referral agency for parents and early care and education professionals. It is located in Minneapolis, MN.

On September 10th, 2012 a digital ad campaign was launched by Haberman, a marketing firm hired by PASR. As of December 21, 2012 there have been 22,437 total visits to the Parent Aware website and 16,526 unique visits. This website traffic is a 425% increase from the same time period last year. Top traffic sources have been Google, Direct, Facebook, and Organic Search (personal communication with Haberman, December 12, 2012). The positive trend of the campaign suggests that the initial marketing efforts have been successful in directing people to parentawareratings.org.

Many marketing tactics are still in planning phases or are awaiting an increased capacity of rated programs. The marketing efforts will increase in 2013, especially to parents. In addition to the digital ad campaign, the array of marketing tactics in use will grow to include radio, increased use of social media, and outdoor advertising via billboards and bus sides.

Incorporating strategies into existing programs like the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Head Start, and Early Childhood Family Education), will continue to be a focus along with direct press releases to parents across the state. Focus groups will be conducted with ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse parents in order to get their feedback to inform effective messaging in brochures and other materials. The information will be used in the development of Parent Aware materials that will be translated in three languages.

Section 2. Program Participation and Ratings

Purpose of this Section:

This section provides an overview of participation trends during the first 10 ½ months of 2012. Key indicators are presented that highlight patterns of Parent Aware enrollment and ratings as of November 15th, 2012.

Key Findings (as of November 15th, 2012):

- 352 new programs had been rated in Parent Aware since the pilot.
- 668 programs had current ratings as of November 15th, 2012. This includes new programs and programs with active ratings from pilot.
- 84% of currently-rated programs were APR (accredited programs, School-Based Pre-Kindergarten programs, and Head Start programs), 8% were non-accredited family child care programs and 7% were non-accredited center-based programs.
- Of the 16% that have received full ratings (largely during the pilot), 36% have a 4-star rating, 45% have 3-stars, 16% have 2-stars, and 3% have 1-star.
- 8% of eligible child care centers and family child care programs in the counties where full Parent Aware ratings were available in 2012 are participating.
- 97% of eligible Head Start sites 33% of School-based Pre-Kindergarten sites are participating.

This section provides an overview of participation trends during the first year of the implementation of Parent Aware through November 15th, 2012. Data are presented on the number of programs that have been rated since the implementation of Parent Aware, the number of currently rated Parent Aware programs as of November 15th, 2012 (includes new programs as well as programs whose rating from the pilot is still valid), the density of participation in Parent Aware, and the distribution of ratings across star levels. These indicators provide a picture of program participation and penetration of Parent Aware in the early care and education market. As program participation and ratings are discussed throughout this section, it should be noted that Parent Aware enrollment in 2012 was limited by an abbreviated cohort schedule in the first half of the year.

Number of Current Parent Aware Ratings

As of November 15, 2012, 352 new programs had been rated in Parent Aware. Of these, one family child care program had received a full Parent Aware rating. The remaining 351 programs were rated through the APR process (see Table 1). In addition, 102 programs had signed a Parent Aware participation agreement. Also shown in Table 1, 316 programs that had been rated during the Parent Aware pilot still had valid ratings (set to expire December 31st, 2012). It is important to track these programs as they make up nearly half of the currently rated Parent Aware programs, and it is not yet known how many will pursue a new rating. Altogether, there

were a total of 668 currently rated Parent Aware programs. As a reference, there were a total of 388 rated programs at the end of the pilot in June, 2011¹⁰.

Table 1. Currently rated programs by program type (from pilot and newly rated)

	Accredited*	Head Start	Center/Preschool	Family Child Care	School Based Pre-Kindergarten	Total
Parent Aware	20	215	0	1	116	352
Parent Aware Pilot**	154	9	48	55	50	316
Total currently rated	174	224	48	56	166	668

Source: Parent Aware Rating Tool database, Department of Human Services (DHS)

*Accredited programs include center-based programs and family child care programs

**These ratings expire December 31, 2012.

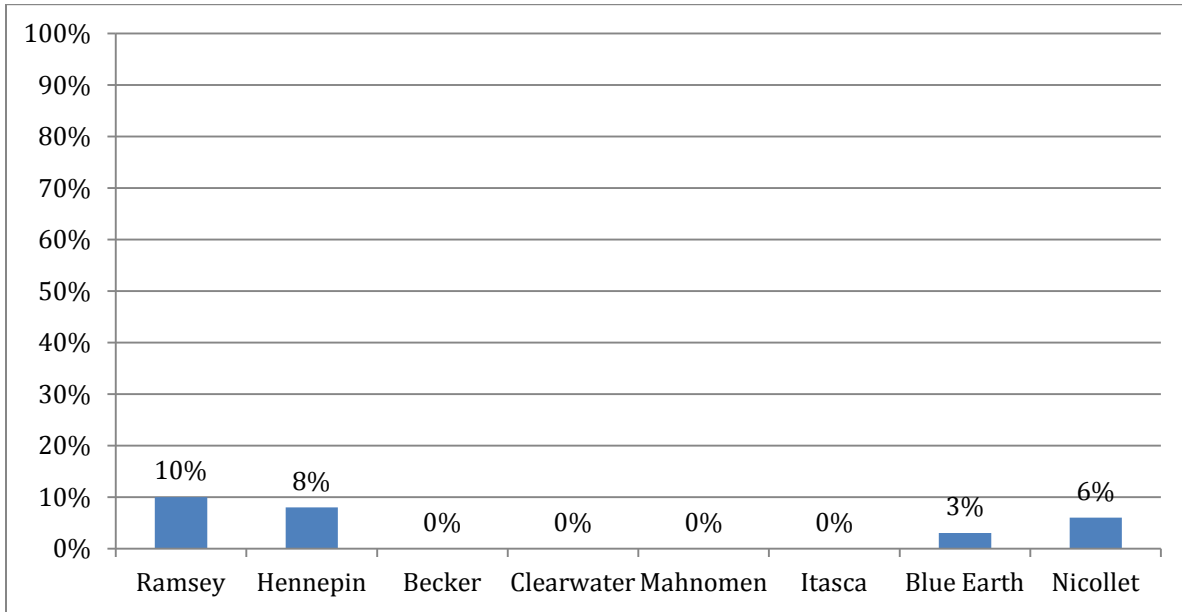
Participation in Parent Aware

Overall, almost 8% of eligible center-based and family child care programs, in the 2012 expansion counties were currently rated in Parent Aware. Specifically, there were 213 programs with current ratings out of 2789 total eligible programs (including accredited programs) across the following counties: Ramsey, Hennepin, Becker, Clearwater, Mahnomon, Itasca, Blue Earth, and Nicollet (NACCRRAware, November, 2012). These are the eight counties in which full Parent Aware ratings are available in 2012.

A breakdown of Parent Aware participation in terms of percent of eligible center-based and family child care programs in each expansion county is presented in Figure 3. Several counties do not yet have any rated Parent Aware center-based or family child care programs. Percentages of eligible programs in each county (excluding School Based Pre-Kindergarten Programs and Head Start programs) enrolled in Parent Aware range from 0-10%. Ninety-five percent of rated center-based and family child care programs are located in Ramsey and Hennepin counties. Nationally, most voluntary QRIS have a participation rate of 30% or lower with some notable exceptions that have a participation rate of 50%-60% (Tout et al., 2010). It is important to note that QRIS that have been in existence for longer periods of time tend to have higher participation rates than QRIS that are in the first five years of implementation

¹⁰ The final evaluation report for the pilot is available at http://www.pasrmn.org/MELF/Parent_Aware_Pilot_Research

Figure 3. Percent of participating center-based and family child care programs eligible for Parent Aware by county

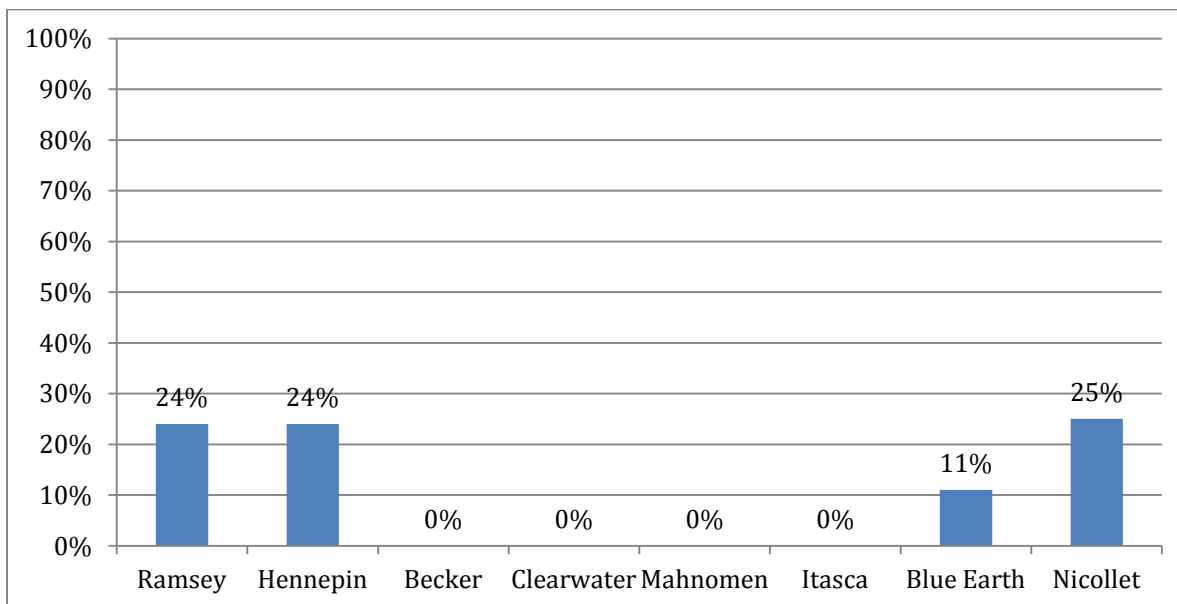


Sources: DHS Parent Aware Rating Tool database, NACCRRAware, November, 2012

Based on the estimated number of Head Start and School-based Pre-Kindergarten sites that exist in Minnesota (as reported in Minnesota’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application), 97% of eligible Head Start sites and 33% of eligible School-based Pre-Kindergarten sites were rated in Parent Aware as of November 15th, 2012. In addition, 70% of accredited center-based and family child care programs throughout Minnesota were rated in Parent Aware as of November 15th, 2012.

As noted during the pilot, participation density varies across program types. Participation density for center-based programs across the eight counties is presented in Figure 4. Participation rates range from 0-25% of eligible programs, with 24% participation in Ramsey and Hennepin counties. For family child care programs, participation rates ranged from 0-3% in greater Minnesota counties and 3-4% in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

Figure 4. Percent of eligible center-based programs (excluding School-Based Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start programs) rated in Parent Aware by county as of November 15th, 2012¹¹



Source: DHS Parent Aware Rating Tool database, NACCRRAware, November, 2012

Ratings of Programs in Parent Aware

A breakdown of currently rated programs by program type and star level is presented in Table 2 and Figure 5. According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, 668 programs had a current Parent Aware rating as of November 15th, 2012.

Eighty-four percent of programs have received 4-stars through the APR rating process.¹² This is a higher percentage of programs than had automatic ratings at the end of the pilot (63%: Tout et al, 2011). Of the automatic/APR programs, 69% are either Head Start or School Readiness programs and 28% are accredited child care centers. Less than 3% are accredited family child care programs. Nearly all of the fully-rated programs received their ratings during the pilot. One program has received a full rating since the beginning of Parent Aware. Of the current fully-rated Parent Aware programs, 37 have earned 4-stars, 47 have 3-stars, 17 have 2-stars, and 3 programs have 1-star.

¹¹ This includes accredited and non-accredited child care centers

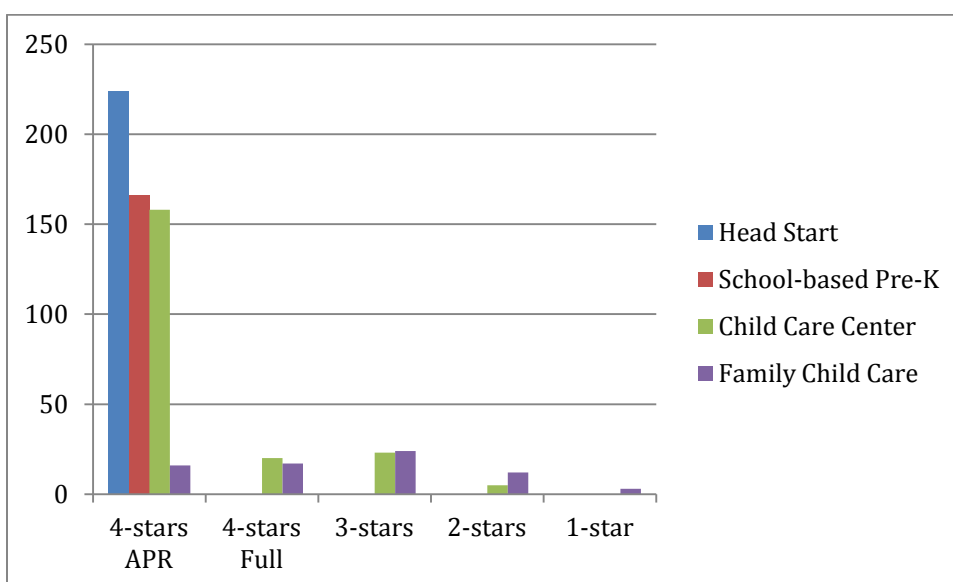
¹² Note that in the Parent Aware pilot, the term APR was not used. Instead, the process for streamlining ratings for programs meeting certain criteria was called the automatic rating process. Automatically-rated programs from the pilot are included in the column labeled 4 Stars APR.

Table 2. Currently rated programs by rating type/star level

Program Type	4 Stars APR	4 stars Full	3 Stars	2 Stars	1 Star	TOTAL
Head Start	224	NA	NA	NA	NA	224
Child Care Center	158	20	23	5	0	206
Family Child Care	16	17	24	12	3	72
School Based Pre-Kindergarten	166	NA	NA	NA	NA	166
TOTAL	564	37	47	17	3	668

Source: Parent Aware Rating Tool Database, Department of Human Services, November 2012

Figure 5. Number of programs at each star level by program type



Source: Parent Aware Rating Tool Database, Department of Human Services, November 2012

At this early point in statewide implementation of Parent Aware, the distribution of ratings is more skewed than it was in the pilot, with the majority (84%) of programs having the automatic/APR 4-star rating. Of the 352 programs that have received ratings in Parent Aware, only one has gone through the full rating process. As more programs go through the fully-rated process, it will be important to track the distribution of programs across star rating levels. It is expected that the distribution will become less skewed as more programs enroll and receive full Parent Aware ratings.

Summary of Participation and Ratings

Participation in Parent Aware increased during the first year of statewide expansion. During 2012, 352 new programs have been rated. Adding newly rated programs to the 316 programs that still have valid ratings from the Parent Aware pilot, a total of 668 programs had current Parent Aware ratings as of November 15th, 2012. The growth in rated programs is due almost entirely to enrollment of APR programs across the state.

In the counties in which full Parent Aware ratings are available in 2012 (Ramsey, Hennepin, Becker, Clearwater, Mahnomon, Itasca, Blue Earth, and Nicollet), about 8% of eligible center-based programs and family child care programs were rated in Parent Aware as of November 15th, 2012. Across the state, 70% of eligible center-based and family child care APR programs had Parent Aware ratings, as well as 97% of Head Start sites and 33% of School-based Pre-Kindergarten sites. Similar to the pilot, there is still a higher participation rate among center-based programs than for family child care programs. Participation rates will continue to be tracked by the Parent Aware evaluation as an indication of the penetration of Parent Aware across Minnesota.

Also similar to the pilot, the majority (84%) of rated programs in Parent Aware have an APR 4-star rating. Of the 16% that have received full ratings (largely during the pilot), 36% have a 4-star rating, 45% have 3-stars, 16% have 2-stars, and 3% have 1-star. It will be important to continue to track the distribution of fully-rated programs across star levels, particularly given the changes in the rating standards since the pilot.

The uptake of fully-rated programs is expected to increase in 2013. Approximately 40 programs have submitted their rating documentation packets and are expected to receive their ratings on December 31, 2012. In addition, full ratings will be available in 14 additional counties throughout the state in 2013. Future evaluation reports will track the growth of Parent Aware by continuing to examine enrollment, participation, and distribution of star ratings across the state.

Section 3. Early Implementation of Quality Improvement Supports in Parent Aware

Purpose of this Section:

This section provides an overview of the quality improvement services provided to fully-rated programs that join Parent Aware with a specific focus on the Quality Coaches and Professional Development (PD) Coordinators.

Key Findings

- Quality Coaches assist programs in Building Quality/Parent Aware by focusing on improving the overall quality of care provided. Coaches target several areas when working with providers including interactions with children, use of curriculum and assessment, attention to health and safety, and overall environmental quality of the program. Providers in Parent Aware only receive technical assistance to prepare for receiving a rating.
- PD Coordinators provide in-depth guidance to programs about the training requirements of the new indicators, how to join MNCPD Registry, and general professional development planning.
- Quality Coaches' successes in working with Building Quality/Parent Aware and Parent Aware-only programs were: the establishment of positive relationships with providers, differentiation of coaching based on the unique needs of providers, and engaging most providers in most of the major activities at each stage of the coaching model.
- Quality Coaches' challenges in working with Building Quality/Parent Aware and Parent Aware-only programs were: lack of time to complete all of the activities in the coaching model in a thorough manner, little face-to-face contact to help develop relationships, describing the changes to the indicators to programs that participated in the pilot, trouble in assisting programs in meeting the training requirements they need to achieve the star rating goal, and few chances to observe, reflect on, and change provider behaviors.
- Overall, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators are challenged by paperwork and processes that are still in flux.
- Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators are generally optimistic about the goals of Parent Aware and that challenges in early implementation will be improved over time.
- Lastly, data about the coaching model was collected in September 2012. At this point, coaches had implemented the coaching model with the abbreviated cohort (March 2012-June 2012 cohort) but had not yet implemented the model with a full cohort (July 2012-December 2012). This context is important as the experiences the coaches describe is likely not predictive of their work with future cohorts. However, coaches' early experiences still yield valuable insights. The goal with the interviews was to capture coaches' initial perceptions of the Building Quality/Parent Aware and the Parent Aware-only model.

Programs that are eligible to go through the full rating process in Parent Aware have two pathways for enrollment.¹³ They can begin with Building Quality: Making Good Things Better or they can enter Parent Aware directly.¹⁴ Recruited programs are placed in one of the two pathways by a Quality Coach depending on whether they serve children with high needs. Child care centers qualify for Building Quality if 20% of their children have “high needs” as defined in the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant application. Family child care programs that are licensed to serve between 1 and 6 children qualify if at least one child has high needs; family child care programs serving 7 to 14 children qualify for Building Quality if two children have high needs. Children are considered to have high needs if they are from low-income families, have a disability or developmental delay, are English Language Learners, reside on Indian lands, are in foster care or are homeless. Programs that do not serve children with high needs enroll directly in Parent Aware.

Building Quality is a six-month quality improvement program that serves two cohorts each year beginning in January and July. Providers join Parent Aware upon completion of Building Quality. Participation in the Parent Aware full rating process also takes six months, with two yearly cohorts beginning in January and July.

Programs going through Building Quality and/or Parent Aware receive support primarily from two different people: a Quality Coach and a Professional Development Coordinator. In this report, Quality Coaches will be referred to as “Quality Coaches” and Professional Development Coordinators will be referred to as “PD Coordinators”. In addition to general coaching, programs in Building Quality receive improvement support dollars in the form of a grant, access to low-cost training, professional development advising, and CLASS coaching, for programs going for a 3- or 4-star rating.

The role Quality Coaches play in working with programs varies depending on whether the program they are coaching is in Building Quality/Parent Aware or Parent Aware-only. In Building Quality, Quality Coaches work with programs in multiple ways to help them improve their quality of care. Quality Coaches engage in a cyclical process of observing, modeling, and reflecting on the teachers’ or family child care providers’ behavior. Programs that go directly to Parent Aware receive technical assistance services that are focused more on assisting them through the process of receiving a rating.

PD Coordinators work with programs in similar ways regardless of what pathway to rating they take. They focus on explaining the training requirements needed to achieve each star level, reviewing records to determine if previous trainings taken by teachers or the family child care provider meet the requirements, assisting teachers and family child care providers in joining the Minnesota Center for Professional Development Registry and providing overall professional development planning.

¹³ See section 1 for further details about a Parent Aware full rating process and the Accelerated Pathways to Ratings (APR) process.

¹⁴ Officially, programs eligible for Building Quality immediately enter a Parent Aware cohort upon completing the six-month Building Quality process. For the purpose of this section, programs eligible for Building Quality supports are referred to as “Building Quality” programs. It should be noted that officially programs are thought of as Building Quality/Parent Aware programs or Parent Aware-only programs. The term “Building Quality/Parent Aware” will be introduced initially and thereafter within the same paragraph as “Building Quality.”

Building Quality/Parent Aware Quality Improvement Supports

According to the Child Care Resource and Referral Network's data collection system for Parent Aware case management, SharePoint, a group of 26 programs entered Parent Aware in the spring of 2012 through the Building Quality/Parent Aware pathway.¹⁵ Another 47 programs began the program in July. The roll-out of Building Quality was delayed, so the first cohort did not begin until March of 2012 and received limited support compared to the six months of support all subsequent cohorts will receive.

At family child care programs, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators work with the owner of the business; at center-based programs they work primarily with the director. Quality Coaches also interact with lead teachers at centers during the observation and feedback process.

Grant funds administered in Building Quality

In addition to coaching, programs in Building Quality/Parent Aware are offered improvement support grants. Quality Coaches help programs identify how to use their grant funding by reviewing their progress on the indicators and providing suggestions for appropriate investment in the areas where they are not meeting the requirements. Building Quality providers receive a total of \$500 in grant funds to spend. For tracking purposes, grant administrators categorize how the grant money is spent. Spending is classified into three possible areas: professional development, environment, and health and safety. Typical investments in each category include:

- Professional development. Programs can use their grant funds to purchase training, PD resources, coaching and consultation.
- Environment. Materials like books, toys, playground equipment or curriculum manuals can be purchased using Environment grant funds.
- Health and safety. Programs can purchase equipment like smoke detectors, medical supplies or fencing using Health and Safety grant funds.

Table 5 details the amount of grant funds administered to Building Quality programs in the areas of professional development, environment, and health and safety. Most programs spent the majority of their grant funds on improvements to the environment of their programs, and some spent all of their funds on the environment.

Table 3. Grant funds by spending category for programs in the first cohort of Building Quality

	Number of programs	Mean	Range
Professional development	22	\$98.45	\$0-500
Environment	28	\$368.11	\$168-500
Health and Safety	12	\$57.46	\$0-300
Total	30	\$438.74	\$75-500

Source: MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network, November 2012. Note: Total number of programs includes four of the 47 programs from the July, 2012 cohort.

¹⁵ Data is entered into SharePoint on a continuous rather than periodic basis. The data reported on in this section is a reflection of what was in SharePoint as of October 31, 2012.

Rating goals of programs in Building Quality

Most programs in Building Quality/Parent Aware chose a goal of 1-star for their first rating (see Table 6). The next most commonly selected rating goals were 3-and 4-stars while only one program selected 2-stars.

Table 4. Star rating goals of programs in Building Quality

	Number of Programs	Percent (%)
One star	19	68
Two stars	1	4
Three stars	4	14
Four stars	3	11
Missing	1	4
Total	28	100

Source: MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network, November 2012. Note: The total number of programs includes two of the programs from the July, 2012 cohort.

Completion of Building Quality

As of November 2012, no program had completed all five stages of the full Building Quality/Parent Aware process (because the first cohort was on a three-month compressed schedule, and the second cohort will not be complete until December 2012). This limits the available information about Quality Coaches' and PD Coordinators' interactions with programs. In the July, 2012 cohort, nine programs have completed the activities through stage two of the coaching model. A review of available data entered by Quality Coaches revealed that, on average, Quality Coaches spent 4.72 hours with programs at this stage over an average of 2.13 in person visits. Only two programs in the current cohort have completed the activities in stage three of the model and one program has completed all of the stages.

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators enter data to document the amount of time they spend with programs at each stage, the number and type of visits, and when each stage was initiated. Subsequent cohorts with full data on each stage will allow for an examination of the work Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators do with programs and the degree to which it is aligned with expectations outlined in the coaching manual.

Parent Aware-only Quality Improvement Supports

Providers enter Parent Aware directly upon signing a participation agreement or immediately after completing six months of Building Quality. According to the MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Quality Improvement SharePoint data, 15 providers from the March 2012 and 27 from the July 2012 cohorts signed participation agreements. Another 13 Building Quality/Parent Aware programs in the July cohort had signed participation agreements.

The focus of quality improvement for programs in Parent Aware-only is on technical assistance. This technical assistance includes a few face-to-face visits with a Quality Coach, guidance on how to complete the Environment Self-Assessment, and a review of the rating process. After a rating is issued, programs can receive up to \$1000 if they receive a 1-, 2-, or 3-star rating.

Programs that receive a 1-, 2-, or 3-star rating continue to receive technical assistance from the Quality Coach and PD Coordinator with the goal of continued improvement of quality. Lastly, programs in Parent Aware-only receive CLASS coaching only after their rating has been issued.

The five stages of the Parent Aware-only coaching model are Recruitment and Orientation; Desired Results Selection; Provide Technical Assistance to Provider around Desired Results; and, Review Results for Quality. Table 7 details the major activities and the typical amount of time the coach spends with the program at each stage of the Parent Aware-only model.

Table 5. Major coaching and coordinating activities for programs in Parent Aware-only

Stage	Major Coaching & Coordinating Activities	Scope of Coaching Activities
1. Recruitment, Selection and Orientation	<p>Quality Coaches attend events and meetings to provide information about Parent Aware and hand out applications.</p> <p>Programs sign a participation agreement and submit applications.</p> <p>Programs attend an orientation session.</p>	Varies
2. Desired Results Selection	<p>The coach introduces the paperwork including the Environment Self-Assessment and Quality Documentation Packet.</p> <p>Paperwork is collected from the program including the Environment Self-Assessment, Goals and Objectives Worksheet, and Building Quality checklist, if applicable.</p> <p>The Quality Coach introduces the technical assistance the program will receive by calling and emailing the program, sending links to websites, and providing supporting materials about the rating process such as the indicators.</p> <p>The Parent Aware Planning guide, a tool used to establish the provider’s responsibilities in receiving a rating, is used to facilitate a discussion about the program’s strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Goals are set using the Planning guide.</p> <p>For child care centers, a CLASS observation is requested by DHS after reviewing the program’s QDP and if the center is going for a 3- or 4-star rating.</p> <p>The PD coordinator will review the changes in the indicators since the Pilot, the process to join the Registry, and the Professional Development Plan</p>	Up to 3 hours

	with the program.	
3. Monitoring Progress toward Desired Results	<p>The Quality Coach checks in with the program about the goals set in Stage 2.</p> <p>The PD coordinator checks in with the program on progress towards completing required trainings.</p> <p>The Quality Coach links the program to resources that help with meeting goals.</p>	Up to 6 hours over 6 months
4. Review Results for Quality	<p>The Quality Coach meets with the director or the family child care provider an additional time to review the portfolio and progress toward meeting goals.</p> <p>The PD Coordinator checks in a final time to ensure that the program has met the training requirements and that the family child care provider or lead teachers have joined the Registry.</p>	Up to 3 hours

Source: Parent Aware: Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, Coaching/Advising Manual, 2012.

Grant funds administered by Parent Aware

To date, only two programs in Parent Aware have received quality improvement grants, so the dollar amount and focus of these grants could not be analyzed for this report.

Rating goals of programs in Parent Aware

In contrast with the rating goals of programs in Building Quality (in which most programs set a goal of achieving one star), programs in Parent Aware are more evenly distributed in their selection of star rating goals across the spectrum of one to four stars (see Table 8).

Table 6. Star rating goals of Parent Aware providers

	Number of Programs	%
One star	11	23
Two stars	12	26
Three stars	11	23
Four stars	13	28
Total	47	100

Source: MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Quality Improvement Sharepoint data, November 2012.

Overall, the data available on quality improvement services for programs in Parent Aware is limited by the abbreviated length of the first cohort and the fact that the second cohort is still in progress. Data available for the next evaluation report will provide a richer sense of the experience of Quality Coaches, PD Coordinators, and programs progressing through Parent Aware.

Quality Coaches' and Professional Development Coordinators' Impressions and Experiences with Parent Aware

Quality Coaches' and PD Coordinators' impressions of the early implementation of Parent Aware were captured through a semi-structured telephone interview. Nine of the 17 Quality Coaches who worked with programs in 2012 responded to requests and completed the interview as did five of the six PD Coordinators. Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators were asked a shared set of questions about their experiences so far in Parent Aware and Building Quality including: length of time in their job; their education and experience; the training they received for their job; the technology they use to document and track their work; the communication they have with programs and with other Parent Aware staff; their perception of the most important activities they engage in with programs; and, their overall impressions of Parent Aware. Quality Coaches were asked an additional set of questions about each of the stages in the coaching model for both Building Quality and Parent Aware.

The interviews were conducted between September 17 and 26, 2012 by a research analyst at Child Trends. The interviews typically took 45 to 60 minutes to complete. All responses were documented and reviewed by researchers to identify and code key themes.

For the purposes of this report, quantitative terms will be used to identify the number of respondents expressing a particular theme in response to the interview question. For some questions, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators' responses are reported separately; for some questions they are reported together. Table 9 outlines the terms and their corresponding numbers of respondents for each group.

Table 7. Terms used to describe the number of respondents expressing particular themes

	Quality Coaches	PD Coordinators	Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators
A couple	2	2	2
Several	3-4	--	3-6
Half	5	--	7
Over half	6-7	3	8-11
Most	8	4	12-13
All	9	5	14
Total	9	5	14

Source: Child Trends' interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Work, Educational and Training Experiences

Quality Coaches

Half of the Quality Coaches have previous coaching experience, with experiences varying widely from 4 months to 17 years. The Quality Coaches' previous coaching experience is mostly in the area of early childhood. Their years of coaching experience with Parent Aware, including the pilot, ranges from 6 months to 4 years. All but one of the Quality Coaches has a

Bachelor's degree with majors like Human Services, Child Development, and Elementary Education.

When asked, “*How does [your prior coaching] experience relate to your current coaching role?*”, the half of Quality Coaches with past coaching noted that their past experience was more focused on building relationships than what they are currently doing in Parent Aware.

In some ways it is unrelated, in that I feel like I am a paperwork coach now. I am helping people fill out paperwork. In the past, I was more in the environment working with people, helping them work with kids.

It helps me when I need to assist the provider with things they need to be doing although the [other project] involved more relationship-based work.

Several Quality Coaches reported that the reflective practice and motivational interviewing trainings they had received to prepare them for working with programs in Parent Aware were the most helpful to them in their job roles. When asked what additional training would be helpful to them, several Quality Coaches said that it would be helpful for them to take the same trainings required for programs in Parent Aware.

PD Coordinators

A couple of the PD Coordinators interviewed have previous professional development coordination experience. PD Coordinators have a range of 6 months to 8 years experience, with an average 3.32 years. All of the PD Coordinators have a Bachelor's degree in a field related to early childhood. Degrees were awarded in field such as Elementary Education, Human Development and Community Studies.

PD Coordinators cited motivational interviewing as the most important training they had received and reflective practice as the second most important training. When asked what additional training would be helpful to them, three of the five PD Coordinators said that it would be helpful for them to take the same trainings required for programs in Parent Aware.

The Role of the Quality Coach

Quality Coaches were asked about what they see as their job role, with the question, “*In your own words, describe your role as a quality coach in Parent Aware and Building Quality.*” Over half of the Quality Coaches believed one of the most important parts of their role is to assist programs, particularly those in Building Quality, by providing intensive support to help them develop and reach goals related to the Parent Aware quality indicators. Other commonly listed components of the role of the Quality Coach were to provide technical assistance related to professional development, quality improvement, and completion of the required Parent Aware paperwork.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on the job role question by answering, “*What are the three most important things you do with providers as a quality coach for Parent Aware and Building Quality?*” Quality Coaches identified a process-related component as being the most important thing about the work they do with providers. Over half of them saw guiding providers through

the early stages of Building Quality or Parent Aware as integral towards establishing a successful coaching relationship.

Quality Coaches also were asked, *“What are you not doing now that you would like to be doing in your role as a quality coach for Parent Aware and Building Quality?”* Among Quality Coaches, the most common response was that they would like to have more time available to spend with programs. Quality Coaches who reported wanting more time used words like “rushed” to describe their experience with coaching and said that the number of hours they have to spend with program is not enough. The second most frequent response, from four of the Quality Coaches, was that they would like to have more opportunities to work on supporting behavior change in the classroom or home, rather than achievement of quality indicators. These Quality Coaches expressed a concern that they are supporting programs in meeting the Parent Aware guidelines but not in making real changes in their practices with children.

The Role of the Professional Development Coordinator

PD Coordinators were asked the same set of three questions as Quality Coaches about their role in working with programs. All of the PD Coordinators perceived that a primary component of their job role is to help directors, teachers, and family child care providers make training choices that meet the requirements of the new Parent Aware indicators. Over half of them also thought that reviewing training histories to fit past courses into the current Parent Aware requirements was an important part of their job while several also stated that general professional development planning was important to their work with programs.

All of the PD Coordinators said that being a hub of knowledge by providing accurate professional development information was one of the most important aspects of their work. They also thought directing providers to other resources when they are not able to provide accurate information is equally important.

PD Coordinators most commonly reported that they would like more opportunities for face-to-face visits and more time with programs. One coordinator stated that face-to-face visits are helpful because they facilitate relationship-building with programs.

Coaching Model: Building Quality

As described in Table 4, Quality Coaches follow a specific model in their work with programs in Building Quality. The model is a relationship-based process with a focus on achieving specific goals and skills. The model uses a framework of “mutual contribution” rather than an exchange of information from an “expert” to a “novice”. Building Quality coaching takes place in five stages over six months. The first stage of the coaching model is Recruitment, followed by Selection & Orientation, and then, Initiation/Relationship Building, Observation & Self-Assessment, Action & Reflection, and Evaluation.

To understand how well the Building Quality coaching model is working to support relationship-building and goal achievement with programs, Quality Coaches were asked a series of questions about the implementation of the model. The questions walked the Quality Coaches through each stage of the model and asked about their engagement in the specific activities outlined in the manual. Quality Coaches were asked to think of the program they had worked

with the longest and answer the questions about that program. Though they were asked to think specifically about only one program, the Quality Coaches often spontaneously talked about their experiences with other programs as well.

Stage One: Recruitment, Selection & Orientation

Quality Coaches were asked about their process of working with programs in Stage One of the Building Quality coaching model. The Quality Coaches that reported engaging in each suggested activity are detailed in Table 10.

Table 8. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage One

Coaching Activity – Stage One	Yes	No
Performing information sessions	9	0
Collecting participation agreements	9	0
Collecting interest questionnaires	9	0
Scheduling the first coaching visit	9	0

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

All of the Quality Coaches reported completing all of the activities with programs at Stage One. When asked to describe their experience working with programs at Stage One, over half reported few challenges and generally smooth interactions with programs.

Everything went very well. She was excited to start and we had a good first visit.

Several of the Quality Coaches noted that having a past relationship with a program really helped in establishing a positive rapport within the new context of Building Quality.

The positive thing is that the provider had already built a trust for Think Small. Even though it was this my first time working with that provider, her trust of Think Small helped. I already knew of this coach, even though we hadn't worked together before, and so it was easy because trust was there.

In this early stage of the Building Quality coaching model, when the activities are primarily introductory, none of the Quality Coaches described any challenges in working with programs.

Stage Two: Initiation/Relationship Building

Quality Coaches were asked about the specific activities that take place in Stage Two of the Building Quality coaching process which emphasizes activities to gather information and to get to know the program and its needs. The Quality Coaches that reported engaging in each of the primary activities in Stage Two are described in Table 11.

Table 9. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Two

Coaching Activity – Stage Two	Yes	No
Touring the program	9	0
Assessing the program’s needs	9	0
Reviewing the coaching participation agreement	9	0
Using the support services tool to provide suggestions related to the program’s needs	4	5
Preparing the program for the next steps	9	0

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

All of the Quality Coaches completed the primary activities in Stage Two with the exception of using the support services tool with programs. Some Quality Coaches were unfamiliar with the support services tool and therefore were not using it in their work with programs. The use of the support services tool is being phased out. Overall, Quality Coaches were mostly positive about their experiences working with programs during Stage Two.

Through their descriptions of interactions with program in Stage Two, it was clear that Quality Coaches began to differentiate how they were working with programs and to individualize the activities they were emphasizing based on the program’s unique situation.

This specific provider has been exceptional to work with. With the first visit she had a lot of nervousness about how it would go. As we did the self-assessment she realized that she does run a great program and looking at her strengths helped her to realize that and where she could improve.

Though it was not described in the manual as a suggested activity for Stage Two, several Quality Coaches said they engaged in steps to address the professional development needs of programs. For example, they described assisting programs with joining the Registry and having discussions about professional development indicators in the revised Parent Aware rating tool.

Stage Three: Observation & Self-Assessment

Stage Three is a stage in the process where Quality Coaches work with programs in an intensive way to support behavior change through observation and assessment. The Quality Coaches that completed the many activities in Stage Three are described in table 12.

Table 10. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Three

Coaching Activity – Stage Three	Yes	No
Observation and self-assessment; briefing the teacher or family child care provider on the process of observation	8	1
Observing the teacher or family child care provider in 2 to 3 activities	7	2
Showing the video (or notes) to the teacher or family child care provider	4	5
Explaining how the results of the observation relate to the Parent Aware standards and indicators	6	3
Completing the Parent Aware quality checklist	8	1
Completing the Environment Self-Assessment	9	0
Completing the Building Quality Goal Worksheet	7	2
Determining star level goal	8	1
Helping teacher or family child care provider determine 1 to 3 goals	9	0
Filling out grant forms	5	4
Working with teacher or family child care provider on how to meet measurable objectives	9	0

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Quality Coaches reported engaging with programs in most of the recommended activities for Stage Three. The two activities Quality Coaches were least likely to have completed with programs were sharing the video or notes and filling out grant forms. Those Quality Coaches that did not complete the feedback session reported that they did not have enough time. Those Quality Coaches that did not complete the grant forms in Stage Three typically had completed the grant forms during an earlier stage.

Stage Four: Action & Reflection

When the Quality Coaches were asked to describe their perceptions of Stage Three, half reported that they did not have adequate time with programs and, as a result, adapted or omitted parts of the model. For example, they reduced the number of observations in programs, skipped the completion of certain forms, and engaged in more informal reflections with teachers or family child care providers rather than structured observations.

We had a shortened cohort so I was not able to observe as many times as I'd like. We only had 3 months before they went into Parent Aware. They didn't have devices to do videotaping at that point. I observed group time two times. The second time she had some specific things she would like me to look for. And I did see her implement some of them.

Quality Coaches perceived that their lack of adequate time with programs also impacted the star rating that programs decided to go for, with programs lowering their initial expectations about ratings.

The provider was supposed to have a class on authentic observation but they didn't get to take it until after the observation period was over. The class was not ready in time. Many had high hopes for a 3 or 4 star and went through the process with that in mind but as the deadline drew closer they decided on a 2. It was hard for me to tell if they had higher expectations than what they were thinking. I learned from the process and will approach it differently next time. It bothers me that I wasn't able to get them to where they wanted to be.

Quality Coaches expressed hope that implementation of the model with future cohorts receiving the full six months of time would allow them to fully engage in each of the activities expected during Stage Three.

Stage Four of the Building Quality coaching model is focused on supporting changes in practices with children and helping promote reflections about practices. Only six of the nine Quality Coaches had reached Stage Four in the model with a program. The Quality Coaches who did reach that stage and the major activities they completed are detailed in table 13.

Table 11. Number of Quality Coaches (n=6) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Four

Coaching Activity – Stage Four	Yes	No
Working with the provider to adopt strategies	5	1
Give the teacher or family child care provider tips and resources to help her develop new skills	6	0
Modeling evidence-based practices	4	2
Observing the teacher or family child care provider implementing new skills	4	2
Providing feedback on progress	6	0
Providing questions to promote reflection	4	2
Helping center directors find resources for the multiple needs of their teachers	0	6

Source: Child Trends' interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Quality Coaches reported completing fewer of the recommended activities at Stage Four than at any of the previous stages. However, most activities were still being completed by over half (or all) of the Quality Coaches, with the exception of helping center directors find resources for the multiple needs of their teachers. As with Stage Three, the major challenge reported by Quality Coaches at Stage Four was a lack of time to complete the necessary steps in the model.

This stage was really rushed. My philosophy is to go with what the provider needs. The steps meshed together because of the short time frame with this cohort but the manual is nice to follow if you get lost. The money needed to be

spent by June and she started in April so we had to backtrack to do the observation. It was kind of loosey-goosey with the model because of the timeframe.

A couple of Quality Coaches noted that the limited timeframe resulted in the recommended activities at Stage Four and Stage Five blending with the recommended activities at the beginning of the Parent Aware coaching model. Presented with the limited time frame for this cohort of Building Quality, the Quality Coaches reported that they selected the activities that best prepared programs for the activities in the early stages of the Parent Aware coaching model.

Stage Five: Evaluation

Five of the nine Quality Coaches had reached Stage Five with a program at the time of their interview. The activities they completed in Stage Five are described in table 14.

Table 12. Number of Quality Coaches (n=5) engaging in the primary Building Quality coaching activities at Stage Five

Coaching Activity – Stage Five	Yes	No
Discussing the coaching experience with the teacher or family child care provider	3	2
Reviewing the program’s goals and objectives	2	3
Preparing the teacher or family child care provider for the next steps	4	1
Making recommendations for additional supports as needed	1	4

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Quality Coaches who had worked with programs in the evaluation stage (Stage 5) were most likely to be preparing programs for the next steps and discussing the coaching experience with them. Quality Coaches were less likely to review program goals and make recommendations for additional supports.

Over half of Quality Coaches described Stage Five as the most rushed of the stages. They tried to complete most of the activities but often did so informally and while simultaneously assisting in the transition of the programs to Parent Aware coaching.

Quality Coaches’ Overall Experiences with the Building Quality Coaching Model

Quality Coaches were asked to reflect upon their experiences across the programs they worked with in Building Quality. When asked about the areas where Building Quality programs need the most support, several Quality Coaches answered that the most important support to offer is assistance and time for teachers and family child care providers to complete the required trainings for their star level goal¹⁶. Other themes touched on by fewer Quality Coaches were

¹⁶ It should be noted that it is not an expectation of the Building Quality model that providers complete all training during the six months of Building Quality; training can also be completed during the Parent Aware-only phase.

that teachers and family child care providers need assistance in providing responsive and nurturing care with children, ensuring health and safety, and implementing strong program management practices.

Overall, the interview responses reflect the reality that most Quality Coaches have only gone through the full coaching model with one cohort and some have not yet made it through all of the stages with even a single program. The first cohort presented a unique case in that they did not receive the full time in Building Quality that will be available to future cohorts. Quality Coaches' comments about the successes and challenges of working with this first cohort of programs reflect the limited time frame for Building Quality.

Quality Coaches' believe that their **successes** across the Building Quality stages included:

- The development of positive relationships with directors, teachers and family child care providers;
- The differentiation of coaching based on the unique needs of programs; and
- Their ability to engage most programs in most of the major activities at each stage.

Quality Coaches' **challenges** reported across the stages included:

- The lack of time to complete all of the activities in the model in a thorough manner;
- Trouble in assisting teachers and family child care providers in meeting the training requirements they need to achieve their star rating goal; and
- Few chances to observe, reflect on, and support behavior change.

Coaching Model: Parent Aware

As described in Table 7 the Parent Aware coaching model has four stages. The Parent Aware coaching model differs from Building Quality coaching model in that it focuses on technical assistance rather than intensive coaching support. Within the technical assistance model, Quality Coaches are considered experts with specific knowledge that they pass on to providers. Parent Aware coaching takes place in four stages over six months. The first stage of the coaching model is Recruitment and Orientation, and then, Desired Results Selection, Technical Assistance to Provider Around Desired Results, and Review Results for Quality.

To understand more about the Parent Aware coaching model and to identify differences with the Building Quality coaching model, Quality Coaches were asked a series of questions very similar to those asked about Building Quality. Quality Coaches were asked to answer questions about the model by thinking about the program they had worked with the longest. Quality Coaches often talked spontaneously about their experiences with other providers, as well.

Stage One: Recruitment & Orientation

Stage One of the Parent Aware coaching model included activities to recruit programs into Parent Aware and to respond to initial questions from programs. Quality Coaches were asked about the primary activities that they engage in with programs during Stage One. The results are detailed in table 15.

Table 13. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the major Parent Aware coaching activities at Stage One

Coaching Activity – Stage One	Yes	No
Collecting participation agreements	9	0
Collecting interest questionnaires	9	0
Scheduling first coaching visit	9	0

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

The Quality Coaches reported that they engaged in all of the suggested coaching activities in Stage One of the model.

Several of the Quality Coaches noted that it was a challenge in their initial work with programs to explain how the Parent Aware indicators had changed from those that were included in the pilot. Quality Coaches reported that some directors and family child care providers were surprised to hear about the changes, even when they realized that they already had met certain indicators in the new Parent Aware rating tool.

Overall, however, Quality Coaches said they encountered few complications in working with programs at Stage One. Indeed, a couple of Quality Coaches noted that the programs’ past experience with the Parent Aware pilot facilitated their participation in the most recent cohort primarily because they were accustomed to the process.

Stage Two: Desired Results Selection

Stage Two of the Parent Aware coaching model focuses on introduction to Parent Aware paperwork and the process of gathering evidence to demonstrate compliance with the Parent Aware indicators. Quality Coaches also work with programs to establish a plan for getting the resources they will need and to establish the programs’ responsibilities in quality improvement.

Table 16 details the number of Quality Coaches reporting that they engaged in the recommended activities in Stage Two of the Parent Aware coaching model. The Quality Coaches completed the majority of the activities. Though most Quality Coaches completed all activities in Stage Two, a few reported that they were not using the Parent Aware planning guide to help establish needs and responsibilities of programs.

Table 14. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Parent Aware coaching activities at Stage Two

Coaching Activity – Stage Two	Yes	No
Introducing the paperwork	9	0
Introducing the portfolio process	8	1
Discussing the type of technical assistance the program will receive	9	0
Reviewing the paperwork	9	0
Using the Parent Aware planning guide to establish needs and responsibilities	6	3
Assisting the director or family child care provider in completing the goal worksheet	7	2

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Though it was not included explicitly as a recommended activity in the Coaching Manual, several of the Quality Coaches stated that they focused on technical assistance related to professional development in Stage Two. This assistance included reviewing the required trainings with directors and family child care providers and determining whether they had been completed. They also helped programs join the MNCPD Registry.

Quality Coaches reported that an important feature of Stage Two involved tailoring the type of technical assistance they offered to the specific needs of the programs. In some cases, Quality Coaches described the challenge of goal setting and supporting the director or the family child care in staying motivated to achieve the goals when they became discouraged or overwhelmed by the amount of work involved. The Quality Coaches also spent time clarifying the type of technical assistance they would offer to programs.

Stage Three: Technical Assistance to Provider around Desired Results

The activities in Stage Three of the Parent Aware coaching model focus primarily on supporting programs in their work to achieve a Parent Aware rating. Quality Coaches check in with programs, review progress, and connect directors or family child care providers with resources that may be helpful to their rating.

Most Quality Coaches reported that they engaged in the recommended activities at Stage Three (if the program they were working with had reached Stage Three in the coaching process)(see Table 17).

Table 15. Number of Quality Coaches (n=9) engaging in the primary Parent Aware coaching activities at Stage Three

Coaching Activity – Stage Three	Yes	No
Checking-in with programs on progress	8	1
Reviewing the program’s goals and activities	7	2
Connecting programs with technical assistance resources	7	2

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Quality Coaches reported that Stage Four is essentially a continuation of the activities at Stage Three. Quality Coaches continued to focus on assisting directors, teachers and family child care providers in meeting the training and professional development requirements for their chosen star level goal. Although several of the Quality Coaches expressed an interest in providing more in-depth assistance to programs, they reported that there was insufficient time to offer a more intensive level of support. Much of the communication with programs was done over the phone and through email, but face-to-face contact was considered valuable by several of the Quality Coaches in maintaining a positive and constructive relationship. In particular, Quality Coaches noted that in-person contact allowed them to review the program’s Parent Aware documentation which is a critical component of the rating process.

Stage Four: Review Results for Quality

Stage Four of the Parent Aware coaching model includes a review of the documentation and preparation for the designation of the Parent Aware rating.

At this early phase of implementation, only one Quality Coach reported completing Stage Four of the Parent Aware coaching process. Most Quality Coaches were in process with a program at Stage Four but did not have enough information to assess how successful or challenging the process was.

Quality Coaches' Overall Experiences with the Parent Aware Only Coaching Model

Overall, Quality Coaches working with programs in Parent Aware reported similar successes and challenges as they did in their work with programs in Building Quality. Quality Coaches focused primarily on providing technical assistance related to professional development and supporting programs in completing the necessary paperwork to receive a rating.

Quality Coaches' **successes** across the stages included:

- Differentiation of coaching based on the unique needs of providers; and
- Engaging most providers in most of the major activities at each stage.

Quality Coaches' **challenges** across the stages included:

- Lack of time to complete all of the activities in the model in a thorough manner;
- Little face-to-face contact to help develop relationships; and,
- Describing the changes to the indicators to programs that participated in the pilot.

Additional Implementation Features of Quality Improvement Services

In addition to the coaching models that guide the work of the Quality Coaches and the PD Coordinators, implementation can be facilitated by other aspects of implementation such as technology, communications, and support. Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators were asked questions about each of these features as well as their overall impressions of Parent Aware at this early phase of statewide implementation.

Technology

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators were asked a series of questions about SharePoint - the primary tool they use to enter and manage data about the programs they support. SharePoint is a web-based tool that allows users to enter information, view the information others have entered, and access documents. The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network manages the SharePoint system used by Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators. The SharePoint Quality Improvement Data system is a new process that was not in place during the Parent Aware pilot. Information entered into SharePoint by the Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators includes, for example, hours of both coaching and coordinating services, by stage; number of contacts with programs, by stage; grant dollars spent, by area (including health and safety, environment, and professional development); star level goal and star level achieved; and achievement of each of the indicators.

Most of the Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators received training to use SharePoint through a webinar covering basic information about navigation of the system, data entry requirements,

and the documentation accessible through the site. On average, Quality Coaches report spending 3 hours per week entering data into SharePoint while PD Coordinators report spending between 1 and 2 hours per week. Not all Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators enter information on a weekly basis; some do it semi-monthly or monthly.

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators stated that the main strength of SharePoint is that it is a web-based system that allows them to enter and access information in a central site. During the pilot, quality improvement data was not systematically collected or entered into a central database that could be used to facilitate reporting and analysis of progress. However, despite their general positive impression of SharePoint, the Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators also reported several frustrations with the technical problems they encounter regularly when using the system. In particular, they described problems saving data they have entered and how time consuming it is when they need to enter data several times before it is properly saved.

Another reported challenge cited by PD Coordinators and Quality Coaches is a cumbersome system design that does not reflect the work as it occurs in the field. Several users suggested that it would be helpful to design the system so that they only see the fields related to their job role (i.e., Quality Coaches would only see coaching information and PD Coordinators would only see professional development information). Over half of the PD Coordinators mentioned that the way the system is designed to collect information, by stage, does not reflect how they work with programs.

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators also mentioned challenges in working with Minnesota Center for Professional Development Registry. Several issues were mentioned including a lengthy process to submit documentation, lack of information about which trainings were needed, and the need to submit paper copies of documentation for family child care providers who are English Language Learners. However, while challenges in helping programs enter and access Registry information were noted by Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators, these challenges were not perceived as dominating their work with programs.

Communication & Support

A second aspect of implementation that is important early in the launch of an initiative is the communication and support available for staff. Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators were asked about the type and quality of communication they have with each other, their peers, and other staff including grant administrators and other staff at the Network.

Quality Coaches perceived their communication with the PD Coordinators as positive. They reported varying levels of communication with PD Coordinators from a couple times a day to a couple times a month. They typically rely on face-to-face communication when they are in the same office and either email or phone communication when they are not.

All of the PD Coordinators described their communication with Quality Coaches as open and conducted on an as-needed basis. Most of the PD Coordinators said that all modes of communication are used, with email and phone being especially beneficial for districts that cover a large geographical area. They prefer having face-to-face meetings with Quality Coaches when possible.

Over half of Quality Coaches and all of PD Coordinators said that their communication with the grant administrators is open and positive but occurs less frequently than their communications with each other. Phone, email, and face-to-face modes of communication are used, typically on an as-needed basis.

Almost all of the Quality Coaches and all of the PD Coordinators described positive communication with staff at the Network. They reported that staff at the Network are very responsive (particularly via email) and timely in their response when an issue needs to be addressed. However, it can take time for certain issues to be resolved. For example, some complex questions cannot be addressed immediately through email or a phone call and need to be presented to a different group to discuss possible solutions. Getting final directions on an issue can take time and the input of various people.

In addition to their experiences with communications, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators were asked how often they meet with their supervisor and the extent to which they receive timely feedback on the jobs they are doing. Their responses are summarized in Table 18.

Table 16. Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators’ answers to questions regarding supervision

	Quality Coaches		Professional Development Coordinators	
Do you have specific times to meet and debrief with your supervisor?	Yes	8	Yes	2
	No	1	No	3
How often do you meet?	Monthly	6	Monthly	2
	Weekly	3	A couple times a week	1
	--	--	As needed	2
Does your supervisor provide you with direct, timely feedback?	Yes	7	Yes	4
	No	2	Don’t know	1

Source: Child Trends’ interviews with Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators.

Overall, most Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators reported that they received feedback on their job performance from their supervisor, though the extent to which the feedback was delivered in planned, regular meetings varied somewhat depending on role.

When asked what additional support would be helpful to them, several Quality Coaches responded that regular coaching meetings with Quality Coaches from around the state to share their experiences and lessons learned would be most helpful. A couple of PD Coordinators reported that it would be most helpful to have more staff to share the workload and more training on the Parent Aware indicators.

Impressions of Parent Aware

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators were asked a final set of questions about their overall impressions of the implementation of Building Quality and Parent Aware. It is noteworthy that they generally did not distinguish between Building Quality and Parent Aware and instead tended to describe and reflect on the program as a whole.

Among the couple of Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators who commented on Building Quality as separate from Parent Aware, there was a perception that Building Quality may be particularly important for those programs that had been in the pilot (because they need to learn the new indicators); however, these programs are not eligible to enroll in Building Quality. They also noted that Building Quality programs serving children with high needs may need even more in-depth support than they are able to receive in Building Quality in its current design.

Programs that were in the pilot were not eligible to be a part of Building Quality and that isn't really quite fair because this round is so different from the pilot. They almost need it more because there are so many differences in the indicators. I know with Building Quality providers are supposed to be serving high needs children and so I feel like those people need even more in depth support than they are receiving.

Overall, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators reflected on the challenges of carrying out their job responsibilities early in implementation of Parent Aware when materials and resources are still being finalized. Several Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators reflected on the difficulty of keeping up with changes, revisions, and updates to Parent Aware. An additional challenge was the compressed timeframe for their activities with programs, and over half of the Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators felt that they had too little time to complete the required activities in the coaching model. Some also reported difficulties with recruitment and questioned the approach to recognizing program quality through paperwork.

Despite these challenges, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators generally had positive impressions of Parent Aware. Over half of respondents thought of Parent Aware as a good and necessary program that will likely improve with time. When asked to describe Parent Aware, they used phrases like “really good”, “impressed”, “a great program”, and “improving”.

Summary of Quality Improvement, Coaching and Coordinating in Building Quality/Parent Aware and Parent Aware-only

Building Quality is a component of Parent Aware that is intended to provide intensive supports to programs serving a high percentage of children with high needs. It is a six-month program that prepares programs for the six-month technical assistance period they go through prior to receiving a rating in Parent Aware. Programs that do not serve a high percentage of children with high needs go directly to the Parent Aware-only technical assistance period.

Quality Coaches assist programs both in Building Quality/Parent Aware and Parent Aware-only. In Building Quality, they focus on improving providers' interactions with children through a process of observation and reflection. In Parent Aware, they provide technical assistance that helps providers meet the professional development requirements of the new Parent Aware indicators and walks them through the paperwork that is necessary to receive a rating. PD Coordinators provide in-depth guidance to providers about the training requirements of the new indicators, how to join MNCPD Registry, and general professional development planning. The services PD Coordinators provide are similar across the two pathways to receiving a rating.

Quality Coaches have a range of 4 months to 17 years (4.5 years on average) of coaching experience. PD Coordinators have a range of 6 months to 8 years of experience, with an average of 3.32 years in any professional development coordination role.

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators completed a phone interview in which they were asked about their experiences and impressions of Building Quality/Parent Aware and Parent Aware-only.

Quality Coaches reported their **most important role** in working with Building Quality and Parent Aware providers was to:

- Be a source of intensive supports to providers to improve quality; and
- Provide technical assistance centered around professional development.

PD Coordinators reported their **most important role** in working with Building Quality and Parent Aware providers was to:

- Help providers make training choices that meet the indicator requirements; and
- Review providers' training histories to check what trainings from the past five years meeting the current requirements.

Quality Coaches' **successes** in working with Building Quality and Parent Aware providers were:

- The establishment of positive relationships with providers;
- Differentiation of coaching based on the unique needs of providers; and
- Engaging most providers in most of the major activities at each stage.

Quality Coaches' **challenges** in working with Building Quality and Parent Aware providers were:

- Lack of time to complete all of the activities in the model in a thorough manner;
- Little face-to-face contact to help develop relationships;
- Describing the changes to the indicators to providers that participated in the pilot;
- Trouble in assisting providers in meeting the training requirements they need to achieve the star rating goal; and,
- Few chances to observe, reflect on, and change provider behaviors.

Most Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators have open communication with other Network staff—Quality Coaches, PD Coordinators, and grant administrators—on an as-needed basis in the mode that is most convenient for them. Face-to-face contact is generally valued but email and phone are used frequently especially when staff are located in an office separate from their coworkers. Both Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators had regular contact with their supervisors and received regular, timely feedback about their job they are doing.

Overall, Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators are challenged by paperwork and processes that are still in flux.

Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators are generally optimistic about the goals of Parent Aware and that challenges in early implementation will be improved over time

Section 4. Perceptions from Key Informants on Parent Aware Implementation

Purpose of this Section:

In an early phase of statewide roll-out, it is important to understand how Parent Aware implementation is proceeding from the perspective of key informants who have a direct role in implementation. To capture these perspectives, interviews were conducted with key informants in different roles and from different organizations involved in Parent Aware implementation. This section includes an in-depth analysis of these interviews and describes key informants' perceptions and experiences with various aspects of implementation, such as recruitment, quality improvement, incentives, data and technology, linkages across the early childhood system, and the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant.

Key Findings:

Respondents expressed that the early successes of Parent Aware implementation included the high enrollment of Head Start and School Readiness programs across the state and the creation of new partnerships and communication across agencies.

Respondents voiced concerns related to messaging about Parent Aware and communication across partners and with providers, the new training indicators, incorporating new and different communities in Parent Aware, a lack of strong incentives to motivate programs to participate, and the lack of a strong data system.

When asked what steps are needed to make improvements, respondents highlighted the need to provide clear messages to programs, have transparency in decision-making, and offer timely answers to questions. In addition, they suggested providing increased supports and incentives for programs, developing a strong training infrastructure, strengthening linkages between key organizations, and improving the capacity to link data in a centralized system.

As Parent Aware continues to be taken to scale statewide, respondents noted the importance of promoting linkages across the early childhood system engaging in systematic evaluation and a continuous quality improvement process; and fostering effective communication and collaboration.

Purpose

Because Parent Aware is in the early phase of statewide rollout, it is important to understand how implementation is proceeding. Information about implementation successes and challenges can be used for planning of next steps and to correct course on issues that are problematic. In-depth details and perceptions about different aspects of implementation are best understood from the perspective of those who have direct responsibility for implementation or who participate on a committee or workgroup that provides input on implementation. To capture these perspectives, Child Trends conducted interviews with key informants in different roles and from different organizations.

The purpose of the interviews was to collect systematic information on the experiences and perceptions of key informants who have a direct role in Parent Aware implementation. In the interview, key informants were asked about their experiences and perceptions of a number of features of Parent Aware implementation including the recruitment strategies and outcomes, the rating tool and quality indicators, the rating process, the quality improvement process, the incentives available to programs, marketing and communications, linkages between Parent Aware and other components of the early childhood system, data and technology, scaling statewide, and Minnesota's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant.

Sample Description

The interviews were conducted between October 8 and November 8, 2012 by a research assistant at Child Trends. Forty-seven key informants were contacted via email with interview requests and 42 of them completed an interview, resulting in a response rate of 89%. Two key informants did not reply to the interview request and three declined because one of their colleagues was being interviewed.

Representatives from the following organizations are represented in the interview data:

- Child Care Resource and Referral System
- Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Department of Education
- Minnesota Center for Professional Development
- Greater Twin Cities United Way
- Parent Aware for School Readiness
- Think Small
- Minnesota Licensed Family Child Care Association
- Transformation Zones
 - Itasca County
 - White Earth Reservation
 - Saint Paul Public Schools
 - Minneapolis Public Schools
 - Head Start
- Minnesota Initiative Fund Regions
- Center for Early Education and Development
- MNAEYC/Accreditation Facilitation Project
- Consultant

Members from following groups are represented in the interview data:

- Office of Early Learning Parent Aware Team
- Parent Aware Advisory Committee
- Parent Aware Communications Team
- Parent Aware Implementation Committee

- Parent Aware Database Workgroup
- Quality Improvement Supports Workgroup
- Parent and Provider Access Workgroup
- Procedures and Policy Manuals Workgroup

Methodology

The interview questions were organized into sections to address different aspects of implementation. At the beginning of each section, respondents were first asked about their level of familiarity with the main topic addressed in the section. Only respondents who said they were familiar with the aspect of implementation in the section were asked further questions. Those who said they were unfamiliar moved on to the next section. Responses were documented and reviewed by researchers to identify and code key themes. When common themes were not identified, singular responses are explained. Interviews were not audio recorded, so the italicized comments used to exemplify themes throughout the report should be considered paraphrased comments and not direct quotes.

In reporting on the findings for groups of respondents, the following terms are used: “Most/majority” is 81-100% of respondents, “Over half” is 61-80%, “About half” is 41-60%, “Several/many” is 21-40%, and “Some” is 5-20% (see Table 19). If two or three respondents voiced a theme, it is noted as such. If one respondent had a comment that captured a unique perspective, it was included at the end of each section. Responses were not included in coding if respondents answered “I don’t know,” the question was skipped due to time constraints, or the response was not addressing the question. The number of respondents for each question was adjusted accordingly in these cases.

Table 17. Terms used to describe the percentage of select respondents expressing particular themes

Term	Percent of Respondents
Most/Majority	81-100%
Over half	61-80%
About half	41-60%
Several/Many	21-40%
Some	5-20%

Recruitment Strategies

Respondents were asked several questions about recruitment strategies and their perceptions of how recruitment is going in Parent Aware implementation. Questions about strategies used, how they vary by program/rating type, and for specific groups (communities whose primary language is not English, programs with high-needs children) were used to inform description of the recruitment process in Section 1 of this report. Key informant perceptions of the effectiveness of recruitment strategies and how they could be improved are discussed here. Thirty-one respondents provided answers on the topic of recruitment strategies.

Effectiveness of Recruitment Strategies

As discussed in Section 1, a variety of recruitment strategies are used for Parent Aware. The Minnesota Department of Education recruits Head Start and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs, and the Child Care Resource and Referral System focuses on other types of programs (child care centers, family child care, and accredited programs). Strategies include contacting programs via email and phone, visiting programs, holding information and orientation sessions, offering incentives, and using marketing tools such as mailings.

Respondents were asked, “*How effective are the strategies in recruiting programs of different types?*” About half of the responses were generally positive comments about effective strategies and about half were about concerns with Parent Aware recruitment. Several respondents thought that recruitment was effective, though some qualified their answer by suggesting that recruitment has been effective for some program types and/or some communities, but not as effective for others. For example, some respondents specifically pointed out that recruitment is perceived to be harder in the metro area than greater Minnesota. Some reflected that differential success in greater Minnesota may be due to programs in the metro that participated in the pilot and are resistant to changes to Parent Aware made since the pilot and/or the programs in the metro that might be easier to recruit are already participating. Other effective recruitment strategies noted by informants include using personal communication, promoting “competition” among programs (for example, if programs see that other programs have joined Parent Aware, they may be motivated to join as well), attaching the Parent Aware application to forms that Head Start and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs are already required to fill out, promoting word of mouth (i.e., conversations between programs), and supporting outreach from early childhood associations. However, each of these strategies was only specifically mentioned once or twice.

Recruitment with School Readiness and Head Start programs is effective when personal communication is used.

[The effectiveness of recruitment] depends on the region. The metro is struggling. I don't know if that's because of saturation, and we're speculating those issues. Outstate has met their targets.

Several respondents voiced concerns about Parent Aware recruitment. Some suggested that the changes made since the pilot have been a deterrent for recruitment. One or two respondents thought that programs are not motivated by neighboring programs that have ratings. They also noted that there is lack of incentives for programs to participate.

We are currently behind on our targets that we set for this calendar year in terms of enrollment of fully-rated programs.

They are having a hard time recruiting people in the metro because of the pilot and now all of the changes.

Suggested Improvements for Recruitment Strategies

Key informants were asked, “*How can recruitment efforts be improved?*” Several respondents said that the messaging about Parent Aware needs to be more positive.

Looking at how we're messaging. The emphasis needs to be on improvement. We're getting negative feedback from providers who don't like the star system because in our society a low star in other industries is so negative/undesirable.

Several respondents talked about the need for clear communication about Parent Aware, particularly about the changes in Parent Aware since the pilot. Respondents noted that questions are often not answered clearly or consistently; there is confusion about process, the new indicators, and what is expected of programs.

There is a lack of clarity answering questions about new indicators and the slowness has caused people to not get involved and sit back and wait.

It's hard to recruit if people don't know what they are getting into. There's been misinformation, or no information, and they felt like it's more of a hassle than it's worth.

Some respondents talked about needing to raise the awareness of Parent Aware and the incentives available.

Just making sure all the potential programs know about it and the incentives.

One or two respondents mentioned the following recommendations for improving recruitment:

- Involve licensors in recruitment efforts
- Use provider testimonials to encourage reluctant programs.
- Target family child care providers
- Emphasize personal communication with programs
- Individualize the messaging to different communities
- Engage the help of early childhood associations to a greater extent

Summary of Informant Perceptions of Parent Aware Recruitment Strategies

- A variety of recruitment strategies are used.
- About half of respondents generally believe that recruitment has been effective, while half are concerned about progress.
- Recruitment seems to be more effective in certain communities/areas.
- Barriers to recruitment include a negative perception of changes since the pilot and unclear messaging and communication.
- Clear communication about Parent Aware and more positive messaging could help recruitment.

Rating Tool & Quality Indicators

Interview respondents were asked a series of questions about the Parent Aware Rating Tool and quality indicators on which providers are rated. Twenty-six respondents answered the questions in this section.

The Parent Aware Rating Tool covers four domains of quality: Physical Health and Well-being, Teaching and Relationships, Assessment of Child Progress, and Teacher Training and Education. Respondents were asked, *“Overall, in your opinion, how well do the indicators on the Parent Aware Rating Tool capture the key feature of quality across these four areas?”* About half of the respondents believed that the tool captures quality across these areas “somewhat well” and several said “very well”. Some respondents doubted that the tool captures the key features of quality. About half of the respondents provided further comments to clarify their responses:

- Several explained that issues lie less with the indicators themselves and more with how programs are asked to demonstrate them. These respondents expressed concerns about the required documentation and measurement of the indicators.
- Many respondents spoke positively about the indicators and rating tool being based on research, the pilot phase of Parent Aware, and the national picture of QRIS.
- A couple of respondents commented on the emphasis on training throughout the quality areas as a mechanism to improve quality.
- Two respondents expressed that more time is needed to evaluate how the tool is working and to refine it when more information is available.

Effective Measurement of Quality

Respondents were then asked, *“Which, if any, of the four quality areas do you think works best on the rating tool?”* Some respondents said they did not think one area was particularly stronger than the others. Only some respondents were able to name which areas work best overall. Of those respondents, a couple said Teacher Training & Education, one said Teaching & Relationships, and one person said Assessment of Child Progress is working best.

Over half of the respondents interpreted this question in differing ways. Some talked about areas working best because they are easily documented or scored. Of these respondents, four people said Teacher Training & Education, three said Physical Health & Well-being, and one person said Assessment of Child Progress is working best because the area has easier documentation or scoring process.

The method of using the Career lattice establishes who is at each step and that’s associated with points in the rating...Capturing professional development levels of staff in child care is important and this area captures it in a good way.

Some respondents discussed which areas are more concrete and easy to define. Of these respondents, four said that Physical Health & Well-Being is the most concrete area and one person said Assessment of Child Progress is easy to explain to providers.

The Physical Health and Well-being area is most easily understood. We talk about this as a foundation and providers historically see these as understandable indicators of quality.

Lastly, some respondents answered this question based on their belief in the theoretical importance of a particular quality area. All of these respondents said that Teaching & Relationships is the most important area.

I think Teaching and Relationships is the standard I want to hold up as the most important. In highly rated programs they use CLASS and that is strong evidence... That category is the hardest to provide evidence for if you're not a 3 or 4 star. In an ideal world, it would be the highest standard with effective evidence.

Less Effective Quality Areas

Next, respondents were asked, “Which, if any, of the four quality areas do you think is less effective on the rating tool?” A few respondents could not identify one area as less effective than other areas. Across most respondents, interpretation of the question varied. Several respondents discussed problems with the clarity of indicators and providing evidence for particular areas. Five respondents said that, in terms of clarity and evidence, Assessment of Child Progress was less effective; four said Teaching & Relationships; and a couple of respondents said Teacher Training & Education.

Teaching and Relationships and Assessment of Child Progress are the ones with most push back. It's not that people don't agree to their importance, but there are challenges about how to meet the indicators.

Many respondents expressed the need for more observation in the rating tool. Two informants voiced the need for observation in general and three said that it is especially necessary in the Teaching & Relationships quality area. A couple respondents mentioned that training is problematic in terms of the lack of clarity around which trainings count, difficulties with provider access to trainings, and confusion about how training is documented.

Any indicators related to training are the most problematic. Folks are frustrated. Proof of training certificates originally seemed like an easy, tangible way to document training. Thus, many indicators became "training documentation." But it's not easy to determine whether training is related to the indicator...there is not always training available on each indicator. Each category has an indicator related to training documentation. This is the challenge.

Quality Areas Missing from the Tool

Respondents next were asked, “Are any key areas of quality missing from the tool?” Many respondents believed that no key areas of quality are missing from the tool. Several respondents thought that observational components were missing from the tool. In particular, five respondents said observation of family child care is missing and three people mentioned that any observation of environments is missing.

I'm concerned that family child care is not getting, for lack of a better word, equal treatment...I'm concerned there is no observation tool for them. I think that's a gap.

Some respondents expressed that indicators related to Health & Safety were missing from the tool. A couple of these respondents also discussed the need to link the Parent Aware tool with licensing. Problems with relying on licensing to appropriately cover health and safety were voiced by a few of respondents.

In the pilot there was so much emphasis on the Environment Rating Scales. Now there is nothing. It's such a huge leap and assumes that basic health and safety is captured in licensing but it really isn't. Adding some more indicators about health and safety would be a happy medium.

A couple of respondents wanted to add indicators related to leadership, administration, and business practices. Two respondents mentioned that they would like to see indicators related to cultural and linguistic diversity added to the tool. Lastly, a couple of respondents said they would like to see indicators specifically about the care of infants and toddlers added.

There were some ideas about areas missing from the tool that were only mentioned by one respondent. Singular responses included:

- Add indicators about communicating with families
- Add indicators for ratio and group size

Suggested Improvements for the Parent Aware Rating Tool

Finally, respondents were asked, “*What improvements, if any, would you suggest for the Parent Aware Rating Tool?*” Several respondents commented on the necessity for clear definitions, rules around interpretation, and consistency throughout the indicators. Some these respondents noted that increased clarity was especially needed around the training indicators.

We have some work to do. Some indicators are not really clear and it's been a concern. What does it mean and what are we measuring? We're well aware of the problems.

Many respondents expressed that more observational measures should be incorporated into the rating tool to ensure the implementation of practices.

Observing instead of putting it on paper. You could be good at documenting things but not good at actually doing it. There should be more balance.

Several respondents noted that it will be important to take time to evaluate the tool and to use the upcoming revision process to guide improvements. A few respondents talked about improvements needed, not necessarily with the rating tool, but in building the infrastructure to provide training to Parent Aware participants. A few respondents discussed enhancements needed with regard to the support system and resources available for programs. A couple of informants thought the tool should allow for more targeted professional development. Improvements needed with regard to the Accelerated Pathways to Rating process were cited generally by a couple of respondents.

We have already and plan to do a lot of work around review and revision of all indicators next year and in particular we have a significant amount of work around the APR pathway. That is full of complexities...our work there will need to look at how this really diverse group of programs should be treated. How can we recognize the quality measures they are meeting from outside bodies or through Head Start performance standards but at the same time ensure that we are measuring quality in some way that is similar to the full rating?

About half of the respondents had single, specific ideas for ways to improve the Parent Aware Rating tool, including:

- Have a content expert review curriculum rather than making it providers' responsibility to demonstrate alignment
- Rely less on training and add more indicators oriented toward the demonstration of practices
- Rethink how family child care providers without GEDs are handled in the Career Lattice to ensure that it is not restricting access
- Include all center-based staff in the standards, not just lead staff
- Work on qualifying and expanding how documentation of coaching and mentoring can be used to meet indicators

Summary of Informant Perceptions of the Rating Tool & Quality Indicators

- Overall, respondents believe that the Parent Aware Rating Tool captures the features of quality across the four domains.
- Respondents perceive that Teacher Training & Education and Physical Health & Well-being are easy to document; Physical Health & Well-being is concrete; and Teaching & Relationships has great importance in the definition of quality.
- The clarity of indicators and evidence needed to demonstrate the indicator were noted for (Teaching & Relationships, Assessment of Child Progress, and Teacher Training & Education.
- The lack of observational measurement strategies in the Teaching & Relationships area is of concern to respondents. There are also perceived difficulties with training indicators across all areas.
- The rating tool is mostly comprehensive, but respondents believe observational measures and indicators around Health & Safety should be considered as additions to the rating tool.
- To improve the Parent Aware Rating Tool, there could be clear definitions and consistency, observation of practices, time to evaluate and revise, and bolstering of the training infrastructure and supports available to programs.

Quality Assurance & Rating Process

Interview respondents were asked a series of questions about the rating process being used to measure indicators and determine quality ratings. Parent Aware has two different rating processes: full ratings for all programs to earn a 1-4 star rating and the Accelerated Pathways to Rating (APR) process for accredited child care, Head Start, and school based pre-kindergarten programs to earn a 4 star rating. In general, few respondents reported having high familiar with the details of the rating process compared to other aspects of implementation. Moreover, many respondents said they had particular knowledge about either the full rating or APR process, but not both. Twenty-nine respondents answered questions about the rating process; eleven answered questions about the full rating process and nineteen answered questions about the Accelerated Pathways to Rating process.

Full Rating Process

Respondents familiar with the full rating process were asked, “*What part of the rating process works most smoothly for programs?*” Over half of the respondents cited that quality coaching is helping to make the rating process work effectively for programs. Specifically, respondents discussed the importance of technical assistance for providers putting together the Quality Documentation Packet.

I think having the availability of the coach for technical assistance while they are gathering their documents. This is critical and most helpful. As they are trying to determine what provides evidence for what, they are talking to the coach.

About half of the respondents mentioned other aspects of the full rating process that are going smoothly. Some of these respondents explained that the effectiveness of the process depends greatly on the individual provider. In some cases, respondents said that it hinges on the provider’s understanding of the tool or, in the case of ELL providers, it depends on their educational background and reading level. One respondent described that for ELL providers, the rating process goes smoothly when the staff involved speak the provider’s language and are a part of the same cultural group.

Other effective aspects of the full rating process were mentioned once, including:

- Programs choosing which star level they are working towards
- Information provided through the website and orientation sessions
- Flexibility for programs to come in at lower rating levels and still be eligible to receive scholarships
- The hybrid rating system with blocks at 1 and 2 star levels and points at 3 and 4 star levels
- Providers preparing for Parent Aware before it comes to their region
- The self-assessment process

Next respondents were asked, “*What part of the full rating process is most difficult for programs?*” The most common response, voiced by over half of the respondents, was that providers pursuing the full rating were having difficulties with training. In particular, respondents mentioned difficulties with getting training done within short timeframes and that

there have not been enough training sessions available to meet these needs. One respondent mentioned that specifically finding curriculum and assessment training has been difficult. Another respondent talked about the high costs large programs accrue by sending all of their teachers to trainings. Several respondents cited that providers have been struggling with joining and navigating the MNCPD Registry.

A lack of clarity about the rating process was cited by several respondents as being difficult for providers. Providers reportedly have had difficulty with unclear language around indicators, getting timely answers to questions, and understanding what documentation needs to be submitted.

I hear constantly that the incredible amount of vague answers and changes have been confusing all along for providers. That's why only a couple of family child care providers signed on. It has been too confusing.

A couple of respondents thought that it was too early in Parent Aware implementation to draw conclusions about what is difficult for providers in the full rating process. Many respondents had singular comments about difficulties that have arisen because of the following:

- There are increased requirements and decreased incentives for programs that participated in the pilot
- Programs do not want to come in as 1 or 2 star
- ELL providers have difficulty meeting education indicators due to a lack of formal education or documentation of their formal education

Accelerated Pathways to Rating Process

Respondents familiar with the APR process were asked, “What part of the rating process works most smoothly for programs?” Half of the respondents said that overall the APR process has been working smoothly. Respondents reported that the application has been easy to complete, and gathering documentation has been straightforward. Several respondents noted that programs eligible for the APR process have already met the indicators through their achievement of outside performance standards. Respondents noted frequently that standards already met by Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs easily align with Parent Aware standards.

In some ways it's more linear... They are more used to working with systems that require quality. They are most used to using curriculum and assessment. They are more familiar with the language and it's an easier sell.

A few respondents mentioned that having MDE as the main contact for programs has been going well. General positive comments about the APR process were expressed by a few respondents. A couple of respondents said that different types of program have different experiences with the Accelerated Pathways to Rating process. These respondents believed that Head Start programs had the easiest time and that, in comparison, the process was not as smooth for accredited child care programs.

Some respondents had singular comments including:

- Allowing programs to submit their application at any time is helpful
- Alignment with ECIPS (Early Childhood Indicators of Progress) is making the Accelerated Pathways to Rating process more appealing

Next, respondents were asked, “*What part of the accelerated rating process is most difficult for programs?*” Similar to the full rating process, about half of the respondents identified struggles with training as a key difficulty. Some of these respondents cited challenges due to the short time frames to complete training and the rules around training approvals. A couple of these respondents said that finding substitute staff, having enough training available, and having enough trained trainers has been problematic.

The fact that there was no way to have the Head Start or School Readiness training hours count for child care providers. We had an ECIPs trainer that was not on the PD Registry and we couldn't use her. They had to be on the Registry. It was a loss of talents and money.

About half of the respondents expressed that frustrations stem from changing the process from the automatic rating during the pilot to requiring programs to meet new indicators. These respondents explained that providers question the rationale behind why this change was made. Issues having to do with funding were voiced by several respondents, particularly for accredited child care and school based pre-kindergarten programs to purchase tools and pay for training. Many respondents discussed that there has been a lack of accommodation made for program size and type. A few of these respondents noted that documenting professional development by staff person and paying for training in large programs have proven difficult. A few respondents highlighted that it is important to consider that school based pre-kindergarten programs vary greatly; one respondent noted the need to address programs that have several sites.

School Readiness programs have to purchase curriculum/assessments. It's very costly for them and they are not funded well. If they do have the right tools, then it's having the time and money to make sure their teachers are receiving the right training.

One respondent discussed funding barriers for programs in greater Minnesota.

We have to find staff time, substitutes, and pay trainer fees to get folks through the professional development requirements. These programs don't have that kind of money. The biggest program in our areas has a budget of \$46,000 a year.

Some respondents brought up difficulties with approval processes, particularly for school based pre-kindergarten programs that bundle their curriculum and assessment tools. Lack of clarity and communication problems were cited by some respondents. These respondents explained that there are unclear instructions for documentation, that changes had not been communicated well, and that programs have “more questions than answers.” One respondent said that the wrong people were contacted initially at school based pre-kindergarten programs and Head Start programs, which caused a lot of confusion. A few respondents said that having any approved assessment tool is difficult for numerous programs. A couple respondents talked about issues with applying to the MNCPD Registry and submitting documentation of learning records and transcripts.

A few respondents had comments that did not fall into themes, including the following:

- Concerns about whether pilot-rated programs serving children with scholarships will lose these children if the program cannot meet the new indicators
- Issues with the Accelerated Pathways to Rating and full rating processes standards not being equivalent

Providers' Understanding of the Parent Aware Rating Tool

Respondents were asked, “*How well do providers understand the Parent Aware Rating Tool?*” In general, respondents thought that providers had limited understanding of the tool. Most respondents explained their response and different scenarios that may be affecting providers’ understanding. For example, several respondents said that providers’ understanding of the tool depends on various factors. Rating type was cited by many respondents as a major factor in whether or not they understand the tool. A few respondents thought that programs going through the APR process do not understand it and do not need to understand it as well as fully rated programs.

I don't think they [APR programs] understand it. I don't want to say they don't need to, but because of the APR process they don't have to look at the full rating and see what that takes.

A few respondents believed that the newness of Parent Aware in many parts of the state is having an effect. A couple of respondents thought that more organized providers who do their own research understand the tool better than those who do not. Several respondents said that providers’ lack of understanding is linked to the lack of clarity and communication around documentation, training, and changes being made.

Not well. Not because they are not trying. Too much is undecided, unannounced, or not communicated. I'm on committees and I don't understand them half of the time because they are always changing.

Some respondents voiced that certain strategies aid providers’ understanding of the tool. Orientation sessions were cited by a few respondents as being effective in providing details. A couple of respondents noted that one-on-one communication with providers to explain the tool has been a successful strategy.

If they go on to the orientation they start to understand. Once they dig deeper and talk to coaches, they understand it.

One respondent said that there has been confusion with the positive messaging around earning lower ratings.

People are unclear that the message now is that being a 1 star is a good thing, whereas before you wanted a 3 or 4 star. Programs don't understand why having any rating is a good thing. It's been difficult for people to understand.

Suggested Improvements for the Parent Aware Rating Process

The final question asked of respondents about the rating process was “*What improvements, if any, would you suggest for the Parent Aware rating process?*” Several respondents thought that the rating process would be improved with clear and timely answers, clarity around indicators, and transparent decision-making processes.

We need to get to a point where decisions are made more quickly and there is a clearer sense of the chain of command... All of the way up to the top, the issues start with being clear about the decision-making tree and communication channels.

Training was mentioned by some respondents as needing improvement, particularly around the MNCPD Registry and wording of indicators. Some respondents thought that resources could be enhanced, like hiring more personnel and offering more coaching time.

We need to have a smoother process for programs working with MNCPD. That's rocky right now and there number of concerns around lack of staffing.

Some respondents expressed again that it is too early to know and that time is needed to collect more data about is working well and what needs improvement. A few respondents voiced that the submission process needs to be streamlined and the Quality Documentation Packet needs to be edited. One of these respondents specifically questioned the timing of submission for family child care providers working towards a 3 or 4 star rating and thought that these providers should not have to submit early like centers because they are receiving a CLASS observation. A few respondents mentioned that the new revision cycle will help to ensure that changes are minimized and thoughtfully implemented.

A recent thing put into place is a schedule of specific times when changes are to be made—twice a year rather than consistently changing things.

A couple of respondents thought that the APR process needs to be streamlined or returned to an automatic process.

I don't think Head Start needs to prove their curriculum and assessment. They prove it to the state, federal government, and their partners. It is redundant and waste of time and money. I would give them automatic ratings. We're just making them jump through more hoops.

A couple of respondents noted the need to link the indicators to research and the importance of using the evaluation to guide improvements.

We need to hold the evaluation as very important and use it to inform changes that we make. There were indications of things from the pilot evaluation and then people made changes. We didn't have enough data to support these and a lot of liberty was taken to add a lot of things.

Several respondents had individual recommendations for improvements to the Parent Aware rating process, including:

- Programs could be given a timeline to guide them through the process
- Coaches could be required to have backgrounds in early childhood
- Audio and visual resources could be created for ELL providers

Summary of Informants Perceptions of the Parent Aware Rating Process

- Quality Coaches provide support to programs during the full rating process and help with the gathering of documentation. Issues related to the documentation of training and accessing training have been more difficult for programs.
- Overall, the APR process is effective for programs and the application has been straightforward. There are challenges, however, with accessing and documenting training, frustrations over changing from an automatic rating and lack of accommodations made for different program types and sizes.
- Providers typically have a low level of understanding of the Parent Aware Rating Tool. Respondents believe that providers' lack of understanding is due to general confusion about the indicators. Their understanding depends on the type of rating process they are going through.
- The rating process could be improved by increasing clarity, providing timely answers, and having transparent decision-making processes.

Quality Improvement Supports

Respondents were asked about quality improvements available to programs, either through Building Quality or through Parent Aware. Twenty-eight respondents answered five questions about quality improvements supports, what has been most useful, and how they can be enhanced for both the Parent Aware and Building Quality pathways to rating.

Building Quality Improvement Supports

Respondents were asked, *“Thinking about Building Quality, what supports have been most useful to programs in improving quality? How can quality improvement supports in Building Quality be enhanced?”* Most respondents said that coaching has been most useful to programs in improving their quality. Nevertheless, several of the respondents who said coaching was useful also thought it was an area in need of enhancement.

I still think that having the one-on-one coaching support is huge. The Building Quality process itself just buys providers more time and more time with their coach to do training.

Certainly allowing more mentor/coaching for providers that want to understand how to implement what they are learning. I can't say that enough.

Many respondents also mentioned quality improvement grant funds as an integral piece to improving quality. However, over half of respondents noted that grant funds are in need of enhancement. Respondents thought both that the amount of support was too small and that the restrictions on how funds can be spent should be loosened.

The \$500 grant could be bigger. Especially for Building Quality programs who have children that meet high risk criteria. They have a lot of needs to improve their program.

A lot of the providers are asking to be able to use QI dollars for sub time or staff time for attending training. We allow 30% of it to be used for that purpose but it doesn't amount to much. It may not be the best thing for them to use their money for, but that's what providers want.

More dollars carved out to purchase curriculum and child assessment tools. They are a huge bite for programs. There is contention about what exactly QI supports can be used for, like online subscriptions.

While coaching and quality improvement grant funds dominated the responses to these questions, a few respondents mentioned other useful supports, like the CLASS observational tool. Several respondents felt that providers need more than six months of Building Quality to prepare for the six months of Parent Aware coaching.

Parent Aware Improvement Supports

Respondents were asked, “Thinking about Parent Aware, what supports have been most useful to programs in improving quality? How can quality improvement supports in Parent Aware be enhanced?” As with Building Quality, the majority of respondents cited coaching as the most useful support in Parent Aware. They thought that having coaches act as a guide to providers and to assist them with the process of getting a rating was an important support for quality improvement.

Coaches who are available to walk them through the process, the tool, the checklist, and the self assessment process. I've heard they are helpful.

Again, I think the coaches. The coaching manual seems to be a great resource for the coaches themselves, so I'm assuming it translates to being a good tool for providers.

The second most useful support noted by respondents was training, specifically, access and cost. Several respondents thought that making training widely available, easily accessible, and at a low cost was an important enhancement of support for providers in Parent Aware.

I'm unclear if we have made the \$5 trainings available, but I hope that is reducing a lot of stress for programs around training requirements.

[There should be] low cost training. I think our PD coordinators have been phenomenal at helping Parent Aware programs navigate and figure out what's already in their learning records so they can put their energy and resources into what they most need.

Over half of respondents said that more quality improvement grant funding to providers was an important enhancement needed for Parent Aware. A couple of respondents thought that supports needed to persist after the issuance of the rating to ensure quality is maintained.

More dollars and sustainability. There needs to be a model in place for money for programs after ratings.

Several respondents also noted the importance of enhancing quality improvement by increasing coaching supports. In particular, respondents felt that the number of hours coaches spend working with Parent Aware programs could be increased.

Suggested Improvements for the Quality Improvement Supports

Respondents were asked, “*What improvements, if any, would you suggest for the quality improvement supports in Building Quality or in Parent Aware?*” The suggested improvements in this section largely reflected the enhancements suggested earlier for Building Quality and Parent Aware: more time to receive support, a wider variety of coaching activities, and increased quality improvement grant funds. Each of these was mentioned by several respondents. A couple of respondents thought that more coaches and more support for coaches would be an important improvement in the support offered to programs.

Summary of Informant Perception of Quality Improvement Supports

- Coaching is a key component of both Building Quality and Parent Aware.
- Though coaching is perceived as a critical support, respondents suggest that coaching could be enhanced if coaches had more time to spend with programs focusing on changing their behaviors.
- Quality improvement grant funds are another important improvement support.
- Respondents believe that grant funds could be improved by increasing the amount of funding available to programs and broadening allowable expenditures of grant funding.
- Greater access to low cost training is seen as a vital enhancement to improving quality supports.
- Respondents feel that more time to complete the Parent Aware requirements, particularly in Building Quality would be useful.

Incentives

Interview respondents were asked about their perceptions of the incentives in Parent Aware for programs to enroll and to improve their quality. Thirty-six respondents answered questions about incentives.

Key Incentives for Programs to Enroll in Parent Aware

Respondents were asked, “*In your opinion, what are the key incentives available in Parent Aware for programs to enroll and to improve quality?*” A variety of incentives were mentioned that relate to financial support, social capital, intrinsic motivation, and quality improvement.

Financial incentives such as scholarship funds and quality improvement grants were most frequently cited as key incentives. Scholarship funds is a reference for two different types of scholarships, state-funded and Race-to-the-Top Early Learning, which will be awarded to families beginning the latter part of 2012. Families will use the scholarship funds to enroll their children in early care and education programs that participate in Parent Aware. Eligibility criteria and the amount of funding each child receives varies by scholarship type.¹⁷

Money for quality improvement was generally thought to appeal to a broader variety of programs than scholarship money, in part because the relative value of scholarships was said to vary greatly by program type and size.

In addition to quality improvement dollars, many respondents thought quality improvement provisions such as coaching, low-cost training, and access to professional development opportunities were important incentives.

A majority of respondents also noted incentives related to marketing. These incentives included marketing materials and support, public recognition and visibility, and the anticipated effect on a program's reputation in the community. The benefits of marketing were thought to be particularly important incentives for programs in regions where scholarships are not available.

The incentive is public visibility that they (programs) are working on improving their quality. It is a parent marketing tool.

For providers who are not in a scholarship area, I think the marketing piece is bigger than the grant. It's more long-term. It has a longer effect on your business.

In addition to financial and market incentives, some respondents talked about programs being motivated to join Parent Aware for professional reasons such as an increased sense of professionalism and membership in a professional community. Some respondents believe this is especially the case for Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs that are accustomed to being part of a professional community, that want to continue being a part of system building, and that want to participate in the conversations about quality.

¹⁷ Administration and distribution of funding depends on scholarship type. State-funded scholarships are eligible to families living in Becker, Blue Earth, Clearwater, Nicollet, and Pine counties as well as the boundaries within the Wayzata school district and the cities of Duluth, Minneapolis, Saint Paul and Willmar. Family income must be less than or equal to 47% of state median income or the child must be eligible for other public funding sources. Children must be between the ages of three and five years old and not yet be eligible for kindergarten. State scholarship amounts vary depending on the Parent Aware rating of a program (Up to \$4000 per child for attending a 3- or 4-star rated program; Up to \$3000 per child for attending a 1- or 2-star rated program; Up to \$2000 per child for attending a program who has signed up for, but has not yet received a Parent Aware rating). There is no minimum weekly enrollment requirement for the state scholarship. The Race-to-the-Top Early Learning scholarships are funded by the Federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant and are available to families living in the Transformation Zones (Itasca County, the Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis, the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood, and the White Earth Reservation). Eligible families' income is 200% of federal poverty guidelines. Children starting at birth to kindergarten entry are eligible. The Transformation Zones determine the maximum scholarship amounts and program eligibility.

Several respondents also talked about programs enrolling in Parent Aware for intrinsic and altruistic reasons. These motives were discussed in a more theoretical sense based on the belief that child care providers generally want to do what is best for the children and families they serve. Part of that, as some respondents noted, requires acting in the best interest of the business. In this way, incentives that leverage the best interests of both children and the business were thought to be most successful in enticing programs to join Parent Aware.

We're hoping over time that there will be altruistic incentives but right now the dollars are important.

Incentives for Programs to Enroll in Parent Aware

After reporting on key incentives, respondents were asked, “*What is your perception of the effectiveness of the incentives for programs to enroll in Parent Aware?*” The majority thought that incentives were low in effectiveness so far, with the caveat that some incentives have been more effective than others and that effectiveness varies by program type.

Incentives are working in some regions, but not others. It isn't cut and dry.

Most respondents said that the majority of incentives have been neither effective nor sufficient so far, as evidenced by low uptake. When describing why they thought incentives were ineffective, many respondents expressed concern that the costs, in both financial and human capital, of participating in Parent Aware exceed the benefits, such as access to scholarship money and quality improvement grants. Of respondents expressing this sentiment, some were concerned that even intrinsically motivated providers wanting to act in children's best interests would find Parent Aware too time intensive and costly to justify enrolling. Nevertheless, there was general recognition that more time is needed to determine the effectiveness and sufficiency of current incentives.

In a voluntary program, incentives have to outweigh the costs. We're not there right now.

Parent Aware is costly for school-based programs so it is holding them back.

For School Readiness programs, there are no incentives. Parent Aware is not bringing in funds; and, instead, it might cause them to spend.

Giving programs little pots of money is not a strong enough incentive for how hard it is to get through this process.

Feelings also were mixed regarding the effectiveness of scholarships in providing incentives for programs to enroll in Parent Aware. Many felt that scholarships are not large enough in amount, nor widely available enough, to have a significant impact on the market. Moreover, it was brought up by some respondents that programs with full enrollment or that do not serve children receiving CCAP (child care assistance program) won't be influenced by scholarships. However, a few respondents thought that scholarships serve as an incentive to family child care providers,

but not center-based providers due to their higher tuition rates. One respondent said that scholarships are particularly helpful for ELL providers.

The effectiveness of quality improvement provisions in enticing programs to join Parent Aware was also thought to vary by program type. A couple respondents talked about how the relative value of quality improvement grants varies based on a number of factors, including program size and budget. Consequently, these grants will be enough to motivate some programs to join Parent Aware, but not others.

Effectiveness varies by type of program. Incentives are the same across program types but the actual relative value of that money is different by program types.

Some respondents said that it was too soon to tell whether the incentives are effective. These respondents were cautiously hopeful that benefits such as quality improvement supports and scholarship money would suffice in motivating programs to join Parent Aware and pursue a rating. There was general agreement that more time and research is needed to better understand the reasons programs do and do not decide to join Parent Aware.

Incentives for Programs to Improve Quality in Parent Aware

Respondents were asked, “*What is your impression of the incentives for programs to improve their quality in Parent Aware?*” Twenty-two respondents answered this question, expressing a range of positive and negative perceptions regarding Parent Aware quality improvement incentives.

Most respondents agreed that, theoretically, quality improvement provisions such as coaching and low-cost training should serve as an incentive for programs to improve their quality. However, the general impression was that incentives have been ineffective as implemented, largely due to inadequate funding, low market pressure, and the high cost of improving program quality. Similarly, a few respondents were concerned that incentives were ineffective in facilitating long-term, continuous quality improvement because grants were only offered once at a rate unadjusted for program size and budget.

Financial incentives to improve quality were most frequently discussed by respondents. Many respondents said that scholarships and quality improvement grants, while better than nothing, did not provide programs with enough money to finance the high cost of improving quality.

So far, there has not been enough money there. The \$500 stipend cannot buy a curriculum. If you are not a big program with savings, it feels unattainable.

Another reason that incentives were thought to be ineffective was due to low public awareness of Parent Aware and minimal market pressure on programs to earn higher ratings. A couple respondents expressed optimism that parent demand for high-rated programs will increase over time and that this will motivate program quality improvement.

Some respondents had the impression that quality improvement incentives have been effective. These respondents talked about the role of non-monetary incentives, including the intrinsic

motivation to improve, an increased sense of professionalism from earning a higher rating, and external validation of one's perceived quality. These were noted by one respondent each.

Respondents also talked about the effectiveness of incentives varying by program type and prior participation in the Parent Aware pilot. A few respondents said that coaching was a significant incentive for fully-rated programs.

Suggested Improvements for Incentives

Respondents were asked, *“What improvements, if any, would you suggest for the incentives in Parent Aware?”* Respondents offered many and varied suggestions for improving incentives, most of which related to the amount and timing of financial support for Parent Aware programs.

Respondents focused suggestions on the provision of financial incentives for Parent Aware programs. Many respondents endorsed increasing the money available for quality improvement, while a few were hesitant about expanding investments until more information is available. Respondents in favor of increasing funds talked about current quality improvement grants being inadequate, especially for making expensive purchases of curriculum and assessment tools.

Moreover, it was thought that increased improvement funds would facilitate a more comprehensive improvement effort; for example, with increased funds programs could address needs related to both curriculum and classroom materials, since the two are interconnected.

A few respondents brought up the need for quality improvement supports to better motivate continuous improvement, possibly by offering funding at multiple time points throughout a program's participation in Parent Aware rather than only once. One respondent noted that quality improvement funds could be tiered based on where a program is in the rating and re-rating process to promote more long-term, continuous improvement without exhausting limited funds.

Beyond reconsidering the amount and timing of financial support given to Parent Aware programs, a couple respondents discussed the need for providing greater clarity around scholarships. Two respondents thought that the process for administering scholarships could be streamlined to better and more efficiently serve families and providers. Overall, there was a feeling that more time and research is needed to discern the effectiveness of incentives before making changes to the system.

Summary of Informant Perceptions of Incentives

- Key incentives for programs to enroll in Parent Aware include scholarship money, quality improvement dollars and supports, marketing support and materials, and personal and social capital.
- In general, respondents believe that incentives have not been effective in encouraging programs to join Parent Aware or to improve their quality once they are in Parent Aware. This was often attributed to the low financial supports available through Parent Aware relative to the high cost in money and time of participating in Parent Aware.

- Parent Aware incentives could be improved by reconsidering the amount and timing of money given to programs for quality improvement efforts and streamlining the scholarship administration processes.
- It may be too early to gauge the effectiveness of incentives. Respondents believe that more time and research is needed to discern the effectiveness of incentives and inform future decisions.

Marketing & Communication

Interview respondents were asked questions about the marketing and communication strategies that Parent Aware uses to provide information to parents. Responses about what methods have been used so far to inform parents about Parent Aware were used in the description of marketing in Section 1 of this report. Key informant perceptions of the effectiveness of marketing and communications strategies and how they could be improved are discussed here. Twenty-nine respondents answered these questions.

Effectiveness of Marketing and Communication Strategies

As discussed in Section 1, a variety of strategies for parent outreach have been used so far, but many are still in planning phases. Among those that have been used are the Parent Aware website, a digital ad campaign, printed brochures, communication during parent referrals, and program marketing kits. In addition, a pre-campaign baseline survey was conducted to gauge public awareness, develop key messages, and learn about parent's behaviors and attitudes.

Respondents were asked, "*How effective have marketing and communications efforts with parents been so far?*" In general, most respondents who answered this question thought that the effectiveness of the marketing efforts with parents has so far been limited. However, several expressed that it is too early to answer this question. Respondents noted that before conclusions can be drawn, more programs need to be rated, roll out needs to be expanded, and more of the planned marketing tactics need to be introduced. Many respondents mentioned that the increased number of hits to the Parent Aware website is a sign that marketing efforts are reaching parents to some degree.

We contract with an advertising agency and get web metrics from them to see the increase of traffic to the website. They went up 60% after the first campaign and we are tracking that over time as we introduce more tactics.

Some respondents discussed issues that may be hindering effectiveness. Two respondents noted that marketing is not targeted enough to low income families, and one respondent said there may be barriers for parents who do not have access to the internet. A couple of respondents noted that parents are not prioritizing quality over convenience and cost when choosing child care.

I don't know that Parent Aware is the first thing that parent think of, to look at quality and ratings. They are concerned if they can afford child care and where it will be.

First we have to stress the problem to parents. We need to stress issues with brain development and that kids are showing up unprepared in kindergarten. Marketing research says that parents don't view early learning as an urgent matter...parents feel good about their provider and that they think their kid is on track. It's talking about the problem first, and then explaining what the ratings do.

A few respondents believed that certain marketing strategies have been promising. One respondent said that one-on-one communication during referrals has been effective. The availability of scholarships was cited by one respondent as having potential positive effects on marketing. A couple of respondents voiced that repeating a parent baseline survey annually is going to help guide marketing efforts. A few respondents were optimistic that the successes of parent outreach during the pilot bode well for statewide implementation.

I think we are on a good track. We have the benchmark survey down and initial ads are running. We just need to do more of what we're doing. We saw in the pilots that hits to the website increased 300-400%. We know when the inventory of rated programs is there that the marketing can work.

Improvements Suggested for Parent Outreach

Respondents then were asked, “*At this point in implementation, what is your perception of how parent outreach could be improved?*” Almost every respondent had suggestions for improvements. Several people thought that Parent Aware should better utilize existing systems that already connect with parents in their marketing efforts. Having stronger connections with CCAP was suggested by a few respondents, and a few talked about the potential of marketing through the scholarship program. Other existing systems respondents mentioned were the Minnesota Initiative Funds regions, health care systems, and refugee and immigrant organizations.

Many respondents shared ideas for different delivery and dissemination methods to bring information about Parent Aware to parents. A couple of respondents brought up advertising in prenatal or pediatric offices, grocery stores, or in local newspapers. Other ideas for dissemination venues mentioned by single respondents included: playgrounds, churches, masques, PTO meetings, emergency rooms, WIC offices, laundromats, and workplace break rooms. A few respondents had ideas for different messengers of Parent Aware marketing, including community educators, community elders, or dedicated Parent Aware staff doing parent outreach on the ground. One respondent brought up the need to market to the broader public, beyond consumers of child care.

Some respondents had ideas about how to better target marketing. One person thought that Parent Aware should market specifically to families on child care program waitlists. A few respondents thought there should be more attention paid to targeting low income parents and parents who have children with high needs. One respondent believed that high risk families, particularly illegal immigrants, should be thoughtfully targeted.

A few respondents emphasized program outreach, rather than parent outreach, with the understanding that educating programs about Parent Aware will in turn help programs to communicate with the parents.

Maybe we could have programs with more training on the process itself and we can be given tools to reach our families to speak about Parent Aware and the benefits for them. It's really all for them. The more we can make that message clear to parents the better. We have a captive audience in Head Start. It would be nice to share that information rather than just put a poster on the wall.

A few respondents expressed the need to ensure that materials are translated and appropriate for diverse audiences, particularly for parents who are multilingual or have low literacy skills. The need for improvement in marketing to rural areas was noted by a few respondents. One respondent said that rural providers need clear messages about the incentives for them to enroll. Another respondent expressed the necessity to rethink the notion of market-driven competition as an incentive in rural Minnesota. One respondent remarked on marketing challenges encountered in areas where only select counties are currently eligible to participate in Parent Aware. Four respondents believed in the value of parent education and that educating parents about the importance of early childhood will lead them to seek out quality care.

We need to have parents understand the importance of early childhood. We need to do more parent education about why the first 5 years are important and that they have long lasting effects.

Some respondents noted that it is crucial to build capacity across the state and have more rated programs prior to marketing, especially with regard to scholarships.

I understand that we don't want to brag about it too much if there aren't enough programs rated. If there are scholarships but no programs to use them in that will work against us.

It's difficult to do marketing when we don't have the inventory of rated programs yet. It's hard to send a person to a site where they search and can only find a couple of rated providers located in their community. It's a chicken and egg problem. When the ratings mature, the marketing will be more effective as well.

Funding limitations for marketing efforts were cited by a few respondents. A few respondents spoke of their excitement to fully implement what has been planned for marketing. Lastly, a couple of respondents discussed the need to better fit marketing into the context of school based pre-kindergarten programs. These respondents explained that, in order for efforts to be effective with school based pre-kindergarten programs, they need to comply with the school year schedule and accommodate earlier enrollment deadlines.

Summary of Informant Perceptions of Marketing & Communications

- In general, respondents believe that marketing and communication efforts have had a limited impact on parents to date.
- It may be too early to gauge the effectiveness of marketing. However, hits to the Parent Aware website, early successes with certain marketing strategies, and lessons learned

from the pilot indicate that parent outreach has the potential to be very effective in the future.

- Marketing could be improved by utilizing existing systems that regularly connect with parents, trying different delivery and dissemination methods, and working to better target certain audiences.

Linkages with the Early Childhood System

One central goal for Parent Aware described in Minnesota's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant application is to integrate and connect Parent Aware with other early childhood system components such as licensing, child care subsidies, professional development for the workforce, health, and special education. Integration is defined as intentional efforts to coordinate, to improve information or data sharing, and to enhance communications. Thirty-nine respondents answered questions about linkages between Parent Aware and other early childhood system components.

Existing Connections with the Early Childhood System

Thirty-seven people answered the question, "What connections exist between Parent Aware and organizations that support programs and providers?" Respondents listed a number of different organizations that are connected to Parent Aware because they support child care providers and programs. The organizations and projects mentioned by many respondents included the MN Association for the Education of Young Children (MNAEYC), the MNAEYC-affiliated Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP), the MN Licensed Family Child Care Association (MNLFCCA), and the MN Child Care Resource and Referral System (CCR&R). Some respondents also mentioned Head Start and community education groups as important partners.

Respondents were mixed as to whether these ties are strong, weak, or developing. Many respondents described them as strong while about half described them as either weak or developing. Often, the same respondent would describe a connection with a certain organization as strong and a connection with another organization as weak. More of them described the connection with MNAEYC as strong compared to the connection with the MNLFCCA which was often thought of as weak.

Concrete connection with MNAEYC driven by the great public private partnership with the Greater Twin Cities United Way.

We are coordinating a lot with MNAEYC. We're participating in their conference and have regular contact.

Some respondents, even those that described the current connections as weak, acknowledged that the building of relationships was still in the early stages and that this work is a process that will continue for years to come.

Links with Child Care Licensing

Next, respondents were asked about connections between Parent Aware and child care licensing, the efforts made to develop or strengthen those connections, and any improvements

needed to strengthen connections. Most of the 34 respondents to this question stated that connections between Parent Aware and child care licensing are weak and have been challenging to establish. One frequently mentioned way to improve connections between these two groups was for representatives to attend meetings with each other to learn more about the work they do. Over half of respondents noticed that this was occurring more often in recent months and thought it was a positive development. Several respondents expanded on this theme by calling for more outreach and education to strengthen understanding of the unique roles that licensing and Parent Aware play in ensuring quality in child care.

There needs to be more there. The licensors have participated in trainings in awareness of Parent Aware.

Folks are meeting more and developing strategies to combine these two to support each other.

The tension between the two systems was described some respondents who stated that licensing is the quality “floor” for Parent Aware. There were mixed sentiments about what that means for the two systems. A few respondents thought that the difference between the two should be clarified and solidified while others thought they should be combined, with licensure being the first quality level of Parent Aware. A few respondents noted that an executive-level decision would be required to bring some resolution to how the two systems should interact.

The baseline is to be licensed. We're trying to promote that the training for licensing be aligned with PA but that's a long road. There's the question if it should be tiered licensed instead of licensing. It needs to be an executive level decision to make it more aligned.

At this point in time, licensing is the precursor and the floor. It's a connection. I'm not sure how to do better but maybe we could be. Mostly it's been you have to be licensed at a minimum and let Parent Aware do the rest. It's very much two different systems.

Another common challenge, noted by some respondents, was that the licensing of family child care takes place at the county level which makes coordination with them difficult. With so many licensors, respondents believed that there is no established channel to communicate information about Parent Aware.

Links with the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Thirty-one people responded to the question, “*What connections exist between Parent Aware and the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)?*” Many said that there is a growing connection between Parent Aware and CCAP established through meetings of staff and general information sharing. However, other respondents felt that there is very little connection right now and that they do not recognize activities to establish one.

Recognition that there are connections. There is more to be done around making stronger connections. Good working relationship, but more to be done.

Strengthening it will be a piece moving ahead. Progress is being made and the same end goal is in mind. Presentations have been made to statewide child care teams.

More than a quarter of respondents noted that Parent Aware would benefit from a tiered reimbursement system, but that there will be little resolution until the legislative action provides a direct connection.

The Race to the Top application describes the goal that we will work towards aligning Parent Aware with rate differential policy. Internally, DHS is working towards trying to make this possible.

Links with the Professional Development System

Thirty-six respondents answered a question about the connection between Parent Aware and the professional development system for the early childhood workforce. Almost all respondents mentioned the central role played by the MNCPD Registry in the professional development components of Parent Aware. They generally reported concerns about the ability of the Registry to meet the training and professional demands placed on providers by the new indicators which are focused heavily on training. Just under half of respondents think that the current MNCPD Registry system needs a technical upgrade to better meet these demands. A few respondents noted that the approval of training submitted to the Registry is slow and efforts are needed to speed up that process.

There has to be a way to make it easier to for these people to attend trainings together and for it to be approved automatically.

The Registry process is overwhelming and time consuming. Providers don't know why they need to care.

Several respondents commented on the need to connect the Registry with the other main data systems associated with Parent Aware like PART 2.0, the main system housing data about the indicators. A few specifically noted the need to align the Registry with other professional development systems like those used by school districts and Head Start.

We are working with two different worlds of professional development: the world of licensed teachers who have their training approved by school districts to renew their licensing, and the world of child care going through the Registry. There has to be a way to make it easier to for these people to attend trainings together and for it to be approved automatically.

Many respondents noted that professional development is the main component of the new indicators for Parent Aware. As such, there needs to be an effort to clarify what trainings meet the requirements and to make those trainings readily available at a low cost.

Links with Health Promotion Efforts

Respondents were asked, “*What connections exist between Parent Aware and health promotion efforts?*” to which 23 responses were collected. Most respondents said that the newly hired health care consultant is the most important connection between Parent Aware and health promotion efforts. Several respondents noted that the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) in general has been a highly visible and involved partner.

Most exciting is the reinstatement of a health consultant network with RTT funds. That set of supports for child care providers we hope will really support the new Physical Health and Well-being category and move forward better health and safety practices.

The one thing that I'm amazed with is that the health department is at the table and is contributing. It is so important for kids. Working with staff and having healthy eating habits.

Many respondents also talked about how it was an improvement to include health indicators into Parent Aware.

I think the indicators talk more about health and nutrition of children. We didn't have this in the pilot. I see that as a real strength. I'm looking forward to see how it affects ratings and improves quality. It's relatively new and exciting.

A couple of respondents noted that it would be helpful to offer a wider variety of health-related trainings to providers and to provide more training to coaches on the health indicators.

Links with Special Education

Sixteen respondents answered the question, “*What connections exist between Parent Aware and special education?*” Half of the respondents commented on the importance of the inclusion of special education into the indicators. Several commented on how this was the result of the importance placed on those indicators in the RTT application.

We did great work at the front end to look carefully at our indicators and make them better support the kinds of best practices and ways in which any type of child care can best support children with special needs.

Some respondents also commented on the importance of the Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC) in providing information and support for the inclusion of special education into Parent Aware.

Summary of Informant Perceptions of Linkages between Parent Aware and the Early Childhood System

- There are a number of provider support organizations that have a connection to Parent Aware. MNAEYC and the MNAEYC-affiliated project AFP are the two programs most often named as having a strong connection to Parent Aware.

- Respondents perceive that the relationship between child care licensing and Parent Aware could be strengthened. Outreach has strengthened the connection and some suggest that there be further alignment of the two programs by incorporating licensing into the rating scale.
- A weak but growing connection exists between CCAP and Parent Aware and information sharing strengthens the ties between the two programs. Tiered reimbursement is a legislative development that many anticipate would be a positive change.
- Training is the main component of the new indicators and the MNCPD Registry is a big part of managing providers' training requirements. Respondents believe that the Registry has not been able to meet the demands placed on it and is in need of an upgrade. Integration of the Registry with other data systems is integral to Parent Aware functioning smoothly.
- MDH is a key partner in Parent Aware. The newly hired health care consultant is a positive development as is the inclusion of health components into the new indicators.
- It was an important step to include special education in the indicators. The CICC will play an important role in providing information and support around the special education indicators.

Data & Technology

Seventeen respondents with knowledge about the data and technology components of Parent Aware were asked three questions about progress and challenges in data integration, collection, and management of information associated with Parent Aware.

Supporting Data Collection and the Rating Process

Respondents were asked, *“How well does the current Parent Aware data system support data collection and the rating process?”* About half of respondents expressed concerns about the lack of integration or bridging between the various data systems housing information integral to understanding Parent Aware. Some of these systems include: PART 2.0, a web-based, restricted system with rating information maintained by the MN Department of Human Services; the MN Center for Professional Development Registry, a web-based system for provider training and education data; and, SharePoint, a web-based system run by the MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network that maintains data about quality improvement, coaching, and professional development coordinating. These systems are currently “siloed” in different agencies and any linking of their data occurs manually rather than automatically using electronic software. Respondents noted a number of concerns about the current lack of capacity for data integration, and hope for increased capability in that area.

We are trying to use SharePoint, which was not designed as a data collection tool, and trying to put it into PART. There is not a bridge. It's been very cumbersome.

It would be great to having coaching information in PART and to tie it into case management so coaches can record and have everything in one place. Another limitation is that we'd like to have things linked, like if an application is filled online that it will be populated into PART not by data transfer and data entry.

The second most common theme voiced by several respondents was that technical difficulties were a regular part of accessing data from PART 2.0. Respondents described the current system as “clunky” and “basic”. One respondent expanded on some of PART’s limitations by saying:

They are still working on the bugs...in two months we've had to add additional fields four times.

A few respondents also noted that some of the major data systems being used, primarily PART 2.0 and SharePoint, are not user-friendly with intuitive designs for users with low knowledge about or training on the system. Many of the reporting functions that would make the system more accessible to a set of users with varying technical skills have yet to be created.

Supporting Integration

Respondents were then asked, “How well does the current data system support integration with other system components such as licensing, CCAP and the PD System/Registry?” Half of the respondents commented that there is very little integration between the major data systems being used to house information related to Parent Aware, echoing comments made in response to the first question about data. A couple of respondents expanded their comments by specifying that the lack of automatic, electronic data sharing is the greatest impediment to a more integrated system. Data can be shared currently but it can only be merged using human resources on a case-by-case basis and it is not systematic. One respondent noted how difficult data integration in the world of early childhood has been, not just with Parent Aware but other programs as well.

We are trying to accomplish this, a better connection system. We have that problem with the Registry, Early Childhood Special Education, literacy, [knowing] where children have been in their early years and connecting that info with school readiness assessments. We are far behind in data collection and data connecting.

Individual respondents noted other issues related to data integration such as:

- The lack of resources for building important data systems
- The centrality of the MNCPD Registry data and the importance that that system function well
- The benefit of having a data system portal that is a “one-stop shop” for entering and retrieving data

Expectations for the Next Generation Data System

Respondents were asked, “What are your expectations about the next generation data system for Parent Aware?” Over half of the respondents noted that it is very important for next

iteration of the Parent Aware data system, PART Next Gen, to be an integrated system with electronic ties to other systems like the MNCPD Registry. A couple of respondents described how such a system would function and that it would not just link current systems but would also eliminate the need for some of the inefficient systems being used in favor of having data entry and extraction in one, central warehouse.

[It should] do what we hope it does! It's exciting to think of everything in one big repository. There will be bumps. My hope is that we strengthen and integrate Parent Aware data. Bottom line is everyone understands the importance of having good, clean data.

Several respondents want the new, integrated system to be more user-friendly to a variety of different types of users. Many respondents want the new system to provide data on children that can be used to inform program implementation and public policy.

Beyond Parent Aware, the other hope that I have from a public policy perspective is that there is aggregate data about kids. So we can look at how kids are doing in kindergarten and what their reading level is in 3rd grade. It would be extremely helpful to look back and see what the quality was of the early care program they attended was.

Summary of Informants' Perceptions of Data and Technology

- Currently, there is very little integration or automatic data sharing between the major systems with Parent Aware data: PART 2.0, SharePoint, and the Registry.
- The major data systems are not user-friendly or technically reliable.
- Respondents believe that data integration is the most important component in the next generation data system.
- The new system should be user-friendly, reliable, and a hub for data entry and extraction.
- Aggregated data from the new system should be widely available to promote its use in program and policy development.

Expanding Parent Aware Statewide

In 2012, Parent Aware is continuing in the original pilot areas and expanding to include the rest of Hennepin and Ramsey counties plus the greater Minnesota counties of Becker, Clearwater, Mahnomon, and Itasca. Currently, full ratings are available in these select areas and Accelerated Pathways to Rating for Head Start, school based pre-kindergarten programs, and accredited child care programs are available statewide. Interview respondents were asked questions about the efforts this year to begin implementation of Parent Aware statewide. Thirty-five respondents provided answers to these questions.

Successes to Date of Expanding Parent Aware

Respondents were asked, “*What have been the successes to date of expanding Parent Aware?*” Several respondents noted that the fact that the Accelerated Pathways to Rating is available

statewide and that Parent Aware is gaining momentum in Greater Minnesota is a success in and of itself. Many interview respondents said that there has been success recruiting high numbers of Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs into the Accelerated Pathways to Rating process. Some respondents discussed that it has been a success to involve and build the capacity of the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies.

I'm excited by the fact that people are embracing it as the infrastructure. Especially CCR&R staff are excited, grasp the importance, and live through the ambiguity. We haven't lost people yet. Those are the folks that make this work.

Some respondents noted that partnerships are forming out of Parent Aware expansion efforts and that people are joining around a central, common goal.

There have been successes around helping people within formal systems understand and be innovative, creative, and engaged. Parent Aware is a platform to rally around. In a way it has been successful in its challenges because it's required more conversations that wouldn't have happened otherwise.

The number of Parent Aware ratings that have been issued since statewide expansion was cited by some respondents as a success.

We've been really successful but it's sad that's not the "word on the street". It's been a huge amount to do in a small amount of time. Given how huge the task is and that we are close to meeting our target numbers is very exciting... We've almost issued as many ratings as were issued in the entire 4 years of the pilot.

A few respondents mentioned that the success of the pilot has been evident in the expansion of Parent Aware. A few respondents thought that all of the work towards building the infrastructure for Parent Aware implementation has been an important and successful step. A couple of respondents mentioned successes communicating with, listening to, and addressing concerns from the people working at the ground level of implementation. Initial marketing efforts to reach parents were noted as successful by a couple of respondents. Lastly, a couple of respondents brought up specific successes with programs on the White Earth Reservation.

Several respondents shared successes that were only mentioned once, including the following:

- Having a communication plan, a hierarchy for decision making, and a plan for revision cycles
- Building social capital and connecting family child care providers
- Having a slow roll-out schedule

Challenges Encountered in Expanding Parent Aware

Next, respondents were asked, "What challenges have been encountered in expanding Parent Aware?" Respondents had many and varied thoughts about the challenges of the expansion. The most common response voiced by several respondents was the challenge of having weak incentives for programs. These respondents discussed that participating in Parent Aware is a costly endeavor for programs and that the incentives are not always attractive enough.

It just doesn't add up to them, what they are asked to do and what's in it for them. It doesn't make sense for their business.

The next most common response, noted by several respondents, involved issues related to communication and clear messaging. It was expressed that the challenges with communication had been occurring across the different levels of stakeholders from providers, to coaches, to state partners.

The communication has been a huge challenge on all levels...The state didn't communicate well that this has never been done before and that we are building it at the same time. There's a feeling that things are top down and that's not necessarily the case.

Some respondents talked about challenges related to the changes that were made to the rating tool and quality indicators. These respondents talked about “push back” from programs in metro areas that had participated in the pilot, frustrations expressed by programs who had previously received an automatic 4 star rating, and general issues related to communicating the rationale behind the changes.

We underestimated how big of a deal it would be to change the indicators and change the automatic rating process. There's been a lot of push back about those changes and so the surprise has been that recruitment is harder in pilot areas than it has been in outside areas.

Some respondents brought up issues with meeting the demands of the RTT-ELC, especially the tight timelines and consequential lack of planning time.

Some respondents found issues related to training challenging during the expansion of Parent Aware statewide. Respondents mentioned the lack of clarity about what trainings count, available and accessible trainings, and an adequate system to track trainings. Having a limited infrastructure for training in place prior to roll-out was noted by some respondents as a challenge. These respondents discussed the need for more resources and supports to be in place, for increased capacity to handle a larger volume of programs enrolling in Parent Aware, and for the “growing pains” in Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to be addressed.

The infrastructure wasn't to the point of launch but then we went ahead and launched anyway.

Some respondents discussed challenges in understanding the differences between rural and metro programs. , Some respondents discussed the implementation challenges with geographical distances, for example, when it is difficult to have in-person staff meetings or to travel long distances to visit programs.

I'm not sure we really thought through how different it is to implement in greater MN than in the metro. We have a cohort model with coaching and reliance on professional development and now all of this is complicated by distance. I'm concerned about what it looks like in greater MN.

Some respondents expressed that there are problems with the roll-out schedule in counties. For example, there are concerns about how to support providers in non-eligible areas who want to participate now and determining the roll-out for tribes that cover multiple counties. In addition, respondents noted that there have been difficulties explaining the rationale behind the roll-out schedule and potential issues with having the Accelerated Pathways to Rating option available statewide.

There is a certain challenge with the fact that APR programs can come on anytime, anywhere, and fully rated programs have to go county by county. If this hasn't caused challenges already, it will.

Two respondents discussed the complex nature of state-level coordination. Some challenges were only stated by one respondent, including the following:

- The need to revisit decisions made to target certain counties for high need children
- Other initiatives are happening concurrently (i3 grant, Northside Achievement Zone, etc.)
- Challenges communicating the stability and longevity of Parent Aware

New Strategies to Support Effective Expansion

Respondents were then asked, “*What new strategies, if any, are needed to support effective expansion of Parent Aware statewide?*” The most common response described the need for improved communication. Several respondents expressed that communication needs to be improved at higher levels and on the ground level of implementation. For high-level communication, respondents said there needs to be common messages from agencies, brisker state-level communication, clear decision-making processes, and increased communication among Parent Aware staff. At the ground level, respondents said coaches need more clarity so they can answer providers’ questions and messages need to be conveyed to providers about the stability of Parent Aware.

The biggest thing is to be clear with people about the program, what the expectations are, and what the benefits are for participating... We need to convey our vision for working with young children in MN and how people participating in Parent Aware are a part of that vision.

I think that we have to get some messages out about the stability of Parent Aware. Parent Aware is here to stay and it helps providers and parents. The messaging about stability and the positive nature of Parent Aware is important as we expand.

The need to minimize changes and standardize processes was voiced by some respondents. However, a few respondents said the opposite—that there needs to be flexibility to make changes and think creatively. Some respondents thought that new people should be invited into the process; in particular, stakeholders from greater Minnesota, provider associations, Head Start, and other state-wide organizations like United Ways.

Engaging new players and new people in the conversation...This feels like the same old players at the table and it's a closed system in some ways. Figuring out a way to open that up and be more transparent and invite others into the conversation would be helpful.

Some respondents brought up the need for better data and research to guide implementation. One respondent thought that it would be helpful to have more data integration and another person said that the issues with the Parent Aware data system need to be addressed.

I wish we had better data about what was going on in the communities instead of hearsay. We have a few very vocal providers. It's difficult to know if they are the minority or majority.

Some respondents believed that it is important to gather feedback and take time to step back and re-evaluate. A few respondents said that new strategies to support effective expansion need to be forward-thinking, anticipate challenges, and give advance warning so providers can prepare before Parent Aware comes to their region.

I think that the CCR&Rs should have some money in their contracts long before Parent Aware comes to their area, maybe even a year to talk about it and offer trainings... More thought needs to be put into advance warning.

A few respondents noted that successful expansion will rely on strengthening the incentives in Parent Aware. Also, a couple of respondents mentioned hiring more staff to increase capacity. Several respondents offered single ideas for new strategies to support effective expansion of Parent Aware statewide, including the following:

- Involving the business community
- Creating a process to “grandparent in” previously rated programs
- Figuring out what works best in sovereign nations
- Returning to an automatic rating process for Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs
- Having PR that reflects the field and has messages that resonate with providers

Summary of Informants' Perceptions of Expanding Parent Aware Statewide

- Early successes of implementing Parent Aware statewide include gaining momentum in Greater Minnesota, recruiting high numbers of Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs, building capacity in Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, and creating new partnerships.
- Major challenges encountered in expanding Parent Aware are the limitations of provider incentives and communication difficulties across all levels. Other challenges include meeting the demands of the RTT-ELC, handling “push back” on the changes made to the rating tool, and navigating the differences between rural and metro areas.

- New strategies to support effective expansion of Parent Aware statewide include improving communication and messaging, minimizing changes while thinking creatively to address problems, and engaging new players in the conversation.

Parent Aware in the Context of Minnesota’s Race to the Top—Early Learning Grant

As described in the introduction, RTT-ELC is a federal grant that was awarded to Minnesota to support and strengthen the early childhood system. RTT-ELC includes a focus on implementing a Quality Rating and Improvement System and on school readiness particularly for children with high need. Parent Aware is a key component of fulfilling the RTT-ELC grant specifications, and respondents were asked for their perceptions of how Parent Aware is meeting grant requirements thus far. Thirty-four respondents shared their perceptions on the implementation of Parent Aware in the context of the Race-to-the-Top Early Learning Challenge Grant.

Early Successes of Parent Aware Implementation in the Context of RTT-ELC

Respondents provided examples of ways in which they believe Parent Aware implementation has been successful in meeting the requirements of the RTT-ELC grant. Specifically, respondents were asked, *“In your opinion, what have been the early successes of implementing Parent Aware in the context of Minnesota’s Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant?”* Early successes of Parent Aware implementation included a variety of responses, many related to system building and communication/collaboration across agencies.

About half of respondents talked about successes in system building in the context of RTT-ELC. The concept of system building included references to linkages between agencies, initiatives or other entities in the system. A few respondents talked about the importance of having the Office of Early Learning in providing leadership and elevating early childhood issues.

Having the Office of Early Learning has given a prominence that wasn't there before and people are starting to notice.

Some respondents talked generally about linkages in the early childhood infrastructure, with Parent Aware playing a central role in the system. A couple of other respondents spoke more specifically about the tie between Parent Aware and scholarships, the inclusion of the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) at the table, and the importance of public/private partnerships in supporting the marketing and evaluation of Parent Aware.

We often talk about Parent Aware being the centerpiece around which many other pieces connect.

Several respondents focused in on the importance of communication and collaboration across agencies. Respondents talked about successes in the collaboration across the Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Others discussed the inclusion of early childhood programs such as Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs.

Coordination with all of the partners is going well.

Several respondents believed that the successes of Parent Aware in the context of RTT-ELC are in the expansion and participation in the QRIS. Some respondents referred to high enrollment in Parent Aware statewide or more generally that enrollment is increasing and that any enrollment thus far can be considered a success. A few respondents focused on the success of enrollment specifically in the transformation zones.

The way the transformation zones are laid out allows us to do things in different kinds of areas/with different populations.

One respondent specifically mentioned the success in the communication with and uptake of Parent Aware by APR programs.

Several respondents thought that having resources in place is a success of the RTT-ELC grant. Some mentioned the importance of the Parent Aware pilot and the fact that a QRIS was already in place. They saw this as already being “ahead of the game” relative to other states. Other respondents talked about having resources already in place, such as staff, tools, money, while others talked about having processes in place.

I think the processes we have put in place to handle the challenges we are running up against will make us more successful in the future.

Some focused on the outreach aspects of Parent Aware as successes. A few specifically talked about attention to underserved communities, particularly in the transformation zones.

Respondents mentioned outreach to parents as part of the communication plan (such as holding parent focus groups) and a generally good public relations (i.e., people are showing interest in Parent Aware) as successes.

Attention is being given to diverse, underserved people and there is an interest in having trainings and materials in other languages.

A few early successes were noted by one or two respondents:

- The potential of Parent Aware to raise quality
- Data system work
- The speed in which Parent Aware is being implemented, the commitment to continuous improvement, and the performance of the coaches

I think our coaches have really risen to the occasion.

Key Challenges of Parent Aware Implementation in the Context of RTT-ELC

Respondents were asked, “What have been the key challenges of implementing Parent Aware in the context of the Early Learning Challenge grant?” The most common response, from almost half of respondents, focused on issues of timing. These responses included talk of fast timelines,

the difficulty of meeting those timelines, and the differences in the timing of components (i.e., scholarships and training system). Many components were in development even as other components were being rolled out.

The second most common response had to do with the size and complexity of the tasks involved in implementation, often in the context of timelines. Many respondents talked about the complexity/size of the task in terms of many things happening at once, many players, and many moving parts. One respondent described the high expectations of the grant as a challenge.

A lot of pieces overlap and depend on each other and they are being rolled out on different timelines and implemented by different departments.

Really worried about the task we said we'd accomplish. It is huge and we have to make sure we have the right leadership to implement and do what we said we'd do.

Challenges include the complexities of the systems, the communities, the database, and the training requirements.

Another challenge discussed by some respondents was the inclusion of new or underserved communities. A few respondents talked specifically about challenges with the transformation zones, that it is a lot of new information for the transformation zones and that there is a lack of fit for some communities; for example, the cultural challenges of working with a reservation and respecting their rules and regulations. Others mentioned that Parent Aware is designed for child care, which leaves out family, friend, and neighbor care, doesn't necessarily reflect family child care, Head Start and school based pre-kindergarten programs, and neglects support of infants and toddlers. For example, one respondent pointed out that many high needs children are cared for in family, friend, and neighbor care and that RTT should include support for that group.

If it is designed to be our statewide system it needs to do this. It needs to reflect school-based and Head Start. Right now it is much more designed for child care. As a lot of things in RTT, I think it doesn't necessarily reflect all of the system.

Some respondents talked about the challenges surrounding the changes made in Parent Aware in the transition from the pilot to statewide implementation. They believe that the changes in the policies and procedures of Parent Aware can be barriers to recruitment. They also struggled with explaining the changes to programs already participating in the pilot.

The new standards and indicators have created unnecessary barriers and not strong enough rewards and incentives. So programs aren't volunteering as much as we planned.

We've made changes to Parent Aware from the pilot and we need to be able to communicate the rationale for those changes and to make appropriate accommodations.

A few respondents talked about challenges with the scholarships, including issues with eligibility rules and how money can be spent. For example, a small scholarship that isn't enough to fund a child could potentially be used to extend the day or year for programs.

For school-based programs, the idea that ELC scholarships can only be used in programs that serve children for 15 hours a week is a problem.

Other challenges cited by one or two respondents included:

- Staffing shortages
- A disconnect between RTT-ELC grant writers and program implementers
- Trouble meeting enrollment targets
- Lack of flexibility in the grant
- Weakness of the data system
- Lack of financial resources outside of transformation zones

Changes or Strategies Needed to Support Parent Aware Implementation in the Context of RTT-ELC

Respondents then were asked, “*What is your perception of changes or new strategies that may be needed to support implementation of Parent Aware in the context of the Early Learning Challenge grant?*” Several respondents focused on communication, whether in marketing to users or among leadership and partner agencies. They described a need to continue strengthening coordination among agencies, and to bring new voices to the table when relevant.

Really figuring out how to communicate and bring in different voices. Bring in outstate school-based and Head Start folks.

Communication to the key stakeholders [parents] and clarifications...the quicker they can make sure all of the components are working together to make things clear, the better it will be.

Several respondents talked about having revisions built into the implementation of Parent Aware. For example, implementation science and evaluation should be relied upon to make improvements and there should be regular cycles for revisions.

We need the opportunity to learn from what we've done so far and evaluate the risk to making changes to things that are proving challenging.

Some talked about needing flexibility with the grant requirements. There is a sense that given the complexity of implementation and the timelines, it is tough to meet the original enrollment targets. It needs to be clear when the grant stipulations are flexible.

One thing that happened already and has to happen periodically is getting permission to revise the targets.

A few respondents talked about needing increases in incentives and scholarships. A few also talked about working to keep up with the timeline.

I think that shifting resources forward in the grant to improve incentives would make a huge difference.

Single responses included:

- Parent Aware should be aligned with Kindergarten
- Need to provide more training and infrastructure
- Need more practice-based indicators
- Think about legislating the Parent Aware requirements (for example, linking Parent Aware to licensing)
- Require an observation for family child care
- Change the APR process back to the automatic process used in pilot

Summary of Informants' Perceptions of Parent Aware Implementation in the Context of RTT-ELC

- Developing effective communication and continuing collaboration are central issues to address in implementation. Respondents believe that collaboration across partner agencies and other stakeholders contributed to early successes, though it remains a key challenge and a strategy for improving Parent Aware implementation in the future.
- Early linkages across agencies and organizations were seen as an important success in system building.
- It has been challenging to implement a complicated program aligned with other organizations on a tight timeline.
- An additional challenge was dealing with changes in Parent Aware and how to connect with participants about those changes, as well as overcome barriers to participation.
- Outreach to communities and different program types are further challenges.
- Strategies to improve implementation in the future include continuing to strengthen communication and collaboration across agencies, and using evaluation to make continuous improvements in the system.

Summary of Key Informant Perceptions of Parent Aware Implementation

Key informants provided rich information on their perceptions of how Parent Aware implementation is proceeding during the first year. Respondents talked about the early successes and challenges of Parent Aware implementation across several aspects of implementation. Respondents also shared their thoughts on how Parent Aware implementation might be improved moving forward into the second year and beyond.

The successes of Parent Aware implementation that were voiced by respondents included the growing momentum of Parent Aware in Minnesota, particularly the high enrollment of Head Start and School Based Pre-Kindergarten programs across the state. Another perceived success is the creation of new partnerships and communication across agencies. Respondents noted that there are more players at the table than there were during the pilot, for example the inclusion of the Minnesota Department of Health and the leadership provided by the Office of Early Learning. Other successes included the expansion of the coaching model as a vital quality improvement support and the new rating tool that captures key aspects of quality.

A general challenge voiced by respondents that cut across many aspects of implementation related to messaging and communication about Parent Aware, particularly between the implementers of Parent Aware and early care and education programs, but also across partner organizations. A lack of clarity in messaging (for example about the changes in the rating tool since the pilot) was cited as a challenge in recruitment and in programs' understanding of the indicators and how to document them. Respondents are concerned especially about new indicators of training, which are emphasized across all quality areas in the new rating tool. Challenges include limited access to training and confusion about how trainings should be documented. Respondents voiced an interest in the inclusion of more observational methods and practice-based indicators in the rating. Other challenges included the difficulties in reaching parents and incorporating new and different communities in Parent Aware. A lack of strong incentives to motivate programs to participate in Parent Aware and the lack of a strong data system were also cited as challenges encountered thus far in implementation.

Though several challenges were voiced, respondents also offered many suggestions for improvement. Respondents saw the necessity for Parent Aware to provide a clear message to programs about the Parent Aware process, to have transparency in decision-making, and to offer timely answers. In addition, they suggested that programs need increased supports and incentives and a strong training infrastructure to facilitate the process of meeting Parent Aware requirements. Linkages between key organizations should be strengthened, and the integration of data into a centralized system will be vital as Parent Aware moves forward.

Across the successes, challenges, and suggestions for improvements, a few overarching themes emerged across interviews. First, there was the recognition that linkages between Parent Aware and existing early childhood systems are growing and are important for success in implementation. A second theme was the need for time to evaluate the system, gather feedback, and make continuous improvements as Parent Aware moves forward. Respondents believe that systematic evaluation and engagement in a continuous quality improvement process are especially important when considering the demands of the RTT-ELC grant that add a tight timeline and pressure to achieve ambitious results. Finally, effective communication and collaboration are seen as crucial to successful implementation of Parent Aware.

Section 5. Summary and Implications

The purpose of this report on the first ten and a half months of Parent Aware statewide expansion is to provide an early descriptive portrait of implementation details, successes and challenges. The findings presented in this report can be used to guide the second year of implementation, particularly as Parent Aware rolls out in new counties and the numbers of programs enrolled in Building Quality and Parent Aware-only increase. In this section, we review key findings from the report and discuss the implications of each finding for Year 2 of implementation. Next, is a brief description of developments underway for Parent Aware this year. Finally, we conclude with a preview of the evaluation reports that will be produced in Year 2.

The Accelerated Pathways to Rating (APR) process accounted for 350 new programs rated in Parent Aware through November 2012. As of November 2012, the number of programs with current Parent Aware ratings was 668 programs (which includes programs from the pilot). Approximately 350 programs received a 4-star rating through the APR process. Enrollment for fully-rated programs was delayed, with only one program receiving a full rating as of November, 2012. It is important to note, however, that approximately 50-70 fully-rated programs were in the process of getting rated at the time this report was being produced (ratings expected December 31st, 2012). In Year 2, enrollment patterns will continue to be tracked and analyzed. In August of 2012, DHS produced the first quarterly Parent Aware report to begin documenting recruitment and enrollment patterns. These internal reports will be critical over the early years of implementation to inform the priorities set for recruitment and to target resources in areas experiencing challenges.

Density of participation in Parent Aware is low. With expansion to new counties, it is not surprising that the density of participation is around 8% of eligible center-based and family child care programs (with higher rates for Head Start and school-based pre-kindergarten programs) at the end of the first year of implementation. Year 2 expansion activities and targeted efforts to recruit programs in new counties will increase the overall density of participation. However, it will be important to track density by county over time to identify counties that plateau in their participation and to develop regional strategies for improving participation.

Incentives for participation in Parent Aware can be improved. Respondents believe that the incentives to participate in Parent Aware and to improve program quality are not strong enough to motivate participation among reluctant programs. However, it is early in implementation to draw conclusions about incentives, particularly since the Early Learning Scholarships have only recently been rolled out. Programs' experiences with scholarships will be tracked by the evaluation to some extent but will be addressed more completely by a new evaluation devoted to the scholarships and the Title 1 incentives being offered to school districts.

It is too early to identify patterns of ratings on the revised Parent Aware Rating tool. Too few programs have been rated using the new rating tool to analyze how programs score on the indicators. Patterns of scoring will be analyzed when the number of fully rated programs reaches 150. Analyses will be conducted to identify indicators that seem to be particularly

challenging for programs. Additionally, analyses will be conducted to identify how programs score if they move past the first two blocks of the rating scale. It will also be important to conduct interviews with key informants who can discuss: the rating process and the experiences programs are having with completing the quality documentation packet; the process of conducting program observations and producing feedback reports; the use of the self-assessment tool; and, the process of helping programs improve on the different indicators in the Parent Aware rating tool.

The central role of training in the Parent Aware indicators is cited as a key challenge for programs. Limited access to training sessions, a lack of clear requirements for documenting training, and challenges with the current training infrastructure (including the MNCPD Registry) are concerns for programs and for staff who work with programs on quality improvement. It will be important for the implementers of Parent Aware to examine issues related to training in Year 2 to identify which issues will be resolved as implementation challenges subside and which issues will need to be addressed with changes to policy or procedures.

The quality improvement supports provided by Quality Coaches and Professional Development Coordinators are a strength of the full-rating process. Despite the compressed timeframe for quality improvement activities in this first year of implementation, Quality Coaches and Professional Development Coordinators report positive experiences with programs. Over Year 2, it will be important to track the experiences of Quality Coaches and Professional Development Coordinators as caseloads increase and they have a greater understanding of the range of programs that will participate in Parent Aware. It will also be critical to gather data on providers' perceptions and experiences with Quality Coaches and Professional Development Coordinators.

Communication across Parent Aware implementation partners and with early care and education programs can be strengthened. The Office of Early Learning is a new cross-agency office comprised of representatives from DHS, MDE, and MDH. While key informants reported on the importance and promise of new leadership for early care and education initiatives like Parent Aware, they also report that coordination of efforts in this early phase of implementation is challenging. Respondents perceive a need for improved communications about Parent Aware and clear processes for addressing and answering questions about Parent Aware. Some tools already have been put in place to aid with communication. As noted, DHS produces an internal quarterly report that can be used by implementation partners to target their efforts and to learn about the different activities that are underway. The Office of Early Learning also began producing an email update on Parent Aware and Early Learning Scholarships that is distributed publicly to provide information about implementation and contact information for implementation team staff that are in charge of different components of implementation. In addition, Parent Aware will hold an implementation retreat early in 2013 to engage partners in discussion about how to improve some of the issues that were challenging in the first year. The outcomes of these steps toward improving communications will be tracked in the Year 2 implementation report.

Minnesota's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant provides an overarching context for Parent Aware implementation. Respondents perceive that the grant has promoted increased collaboration across agencies and has brought new partners into Parent Aware. The grant also has added pressure to implementation by imposing a tight timeline and ambitious targets for enrollment and outcomes. Over the next year of implementation, it will be important to build the data reports and systems needed to track progress and to identify areas where a different course is needed to achieve planned outcomes.

Marketing efforts are underway. It is too early to document the success of marketing efforts, but there is optimism about the potential for new marketing tactics to be effective. Parents remain a key target of Parent Aware and intentional efforts to engage parents in the ratings and to track their understanding and use of the tool are critical.

Implementation of Parent Aware in greater Minnesota is different from implementation in the metro area. Respondents report mixed success of implementing Parent Aware in greater Minnesota. Efforts to systematically understand the success and challenges in different regions of the state will be beneficial.

Overall, implementation in Year 2 included both successes and challenges. On some issues (such as program ratings and marketing), it is simply too soon to know. Evaluation efforts as well as internal program efforts to track implementation will continue to yield important information.

In Year 2 of statewide expansion, Child Trends will continue to track implementation details and patterns of program enrollment, participation and ratings. The following evaluation activities are planned:

- A brief report on program and provider perceptions of Parent Aware will be produced in the first quarter of 2013. The purpose of this report will be to document the experiences and opinions of providers in different program types and in different geographical regions. The report will include respondents from programs that already are participating in Parent Aware as well as those who expressed initial interest in Parent Aware but have not yet enrolled.
- A brief report on the self-assessment tool used in Parent Aware will be produced in the summer of 2013. The purpose of this report will be to provide the implementers of Parent Aware with information about how well the tool is working with programs.
- A Year 2 report will be produced in November of 2013 that will focus on a review of program ratings to date as well as provide an update on implementation in the second year of statewide expansion.
- Evaluation reports in later years will include an analysis of quality improvement, children's development in rated programs, and information about programs' global quality as measured through observation.

New Developments for Year 2 of Implementation

A number of the implementation issues described in this report have been topics of discussion among Parent Aware implementation partners over the last half of 2012. It is important to note that course corrections are already underway to address issues such as communication and processes for making changes to implementation processes. The Minnesota Department of Human Services, on behalf of the Office of Early Learning, provided the evaluation team with details about opportunities for refinements and modification of implementation processes and the strategies that will be used in Year 2 to address implementation challenges. This section provides an update on new processes and procedures for Year 2.

Challenge: Improve communication with Parent Aware implementation partners and with Parent Aware participants

Several approaches to improve communication among stakeholders and with Parent Aware participants and other early care and education providers have been adopted in 2012. First, beginning in July 2012, there has been a procedure in place to facilitate communication between the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Child Care Resource and Referral Network. There is a weekly communication log that the Network sends to DHS every Thursday. DHS responds to them as soon as possible, usually by Monday. Answers are communicated back to the Network and forwarded on to Quality Coaches and providers. In instances when a question cannot be answered because it involves a policy decision overseen by someone else or some other group, the question is brought before that person/group. DHS is committed to working hard on communications with stakeholders.

A second way to enhance communication is through the Parent Aware website. Providers can gather information about Parent Aware from the website (www.parentawareratings.org), including several one-page resource documents that address commonly-asked questions. For example, there is a training preparation guide that was developed in response to questions that providers had about which trainings “count” for the training indicators in Parent Aware. In addition, Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) has made an investment this past year to redesign and update the Parent Aware website. The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network has hands-on responsibility to keep the website’s content updated on an ongoing basis. The Parent Aware website is promoted as a place for both parents and providers to go to for accurate and up-to-date information.

A third way communication has been improved is through the Parent Aware and Early Learning Scholarship email that is distributed quarterly. It is sent to various stakeholders, including the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIF) and those on the Parent Aware Advisory Committee.

A final response to communication challenges has been the introduction of the Early Connections newsletter issued by the Minnesota Department of Education through the Office of Early Learning. This is sent to various stakeholders and includes updates about broader early childhood initiatives, not solely Parent Aware.

Challenge: Improving implementation without creating instability

In the first year of implementation, providers offered the feedback that policy changes were happening too often and too quickly. In September 2012, DHS instituted a twice yearly implementation update to the CCR&R system. Going forward, the CCR&R and other stakeholders are notified of upcoming changes to implementation on October 1st and April 1st. Changes can include updates to forms or changes to policy. Changes take effect on January 1st and July 1st respectively (giving the CCR&R system 90 days to adjust to the changes before they are implemented). Containing changes to twice per calendar year allows for greater clarity and less confusion on behalf of implementation partners and providers.

Challenge: Improving capacity of the Minnesota Center for Professional Development Registry

DHS is investing \$300,000 in one-time funding due to a federal fiscal year 2012 increase in Minnesota's Child Care Development Fund allocation to address technical and capacity issues of the Registry. A Request for Proposals has been issued to rebuild the online Registry with a goal to have the new Registry available for use in 2013.

Challenge: Need for low-cost training

Beginning in 2013, \$5/hour training will be rolling out statewide for child care providers supported by funding through Minnesota's Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant. This training is Parent Aware-approved and will increase the affordability of the training requirements for providers.

Challenge: Achieving new curriculum and assessment requirements for programs in Parent Aware

In 2013, an additional \$500,000 in one-time funding due to a federal fiscal year 2012 increase in Minnesota's Child Care Development Fund allocation will be used for Mini-Grants available through the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral System. Any early childhood care and education program participating in Parent Aware may apply for \$1000 Mini-Grants, which can be used for curriculum and assessment training and can be used to purchase Parent Aware-approved curriculum and assessment materials. Additionally, this investment will increase the frequency of curriculum and assessment training state-wide.

Challenge: Delays in enrollment and rating early in implementation

The decision was made to allow programs in the March 2012 cohort to delay rating and join the July 2012 cohort. As a result, only one program decided to remain in the March 2012 cohort. This is the only program that received a rating during the time span which this evaluation report covers. This allowed for providers to have more time to prepare for their rating, but also resulted in a year when few new full ratings were issued.

Providers going through the full rating process in 2012 were also given another accommodation. Programs whose quality documentation was missing were given a second opportunity to submit additional information. Many providers responded by submitting more documentation. This process may not be sustainable in the long-term however, but was put in place to be flexible with providers this first year.

Challenge: Submitting teacher learning records

Time-limited policies have been put in place for teachers who need to submit training history as reflected on their learning record. Temporarily, providers may submit training certificates as record of training evidence.

Challenge: Increasing recruitment

DHS has emphasized collaboration with key partners to boost recruitment. For example, DHS has collaborated with the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children and the Greater Twin Cities United Way to create a streamlined process for programs that participate in the Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) to step into Parent Aware if they are interested.

Appendix A: Data Sources

Key informant interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants between October 8 and November 8, 2012 by a research assistant at Child Trends. In the interview, key informants were asked about their experiences and perceptions of a number of features of Parent Aware implementation including the recruitment strategies and outcomes, the rating tool and quality indicators, the rating process, the quality improvement process, the incentives available to programs, marketing and communications, linkages between Parent Aware and other components of the early childhood system, data and technology, scaling statewide, and Minnesota's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant.

Quality Coach and PD Coordinator interviews: Quality Coaches and PD Coordinators that provide quality improvement services to programs were interviewed for the third section of this report, Quality Improvement Services in Parent Aware. Nine Quality coaches and five PD Coordinators completed semi-structured phone interviews on topics such as their work experience, technology, communication, and impressions of Parent Aware.

MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R), SharePoint case management data system: The CCR&R SharePoint data system houses information about the quality improvement services provided to programs in Parent Aware. It includes data like the number of hours of coaching and PD coordinating that programs receive, the type of contact they have with programs, programs' star rating goals, and the amount of quality improvement grant funds awarded and spent by programs. Data from SharePoint from October 2012 is presented in the third section of this report, Quality Improvement Services in Parent Aware.

Parent Aware Rating Tool 2.0 (PART 2.0), Department of Human Services: PART 2.0, a data system managed by the MN Department of Human Services, contains information about programs in Parent Aware, their star rating, and the points awarded for achievement of each quality indicator. Data from PART 2.0 that was used for the second section of this report, Program Participation and Rating, was downloaded November 2012.

NACCRRAware, Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network: NACCRRAware is a web-based data system housed by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. The Minnesota NACCRRAware dataset contains a list of all licensed Head Start/Early Head Start, center-based, preschool, and family child care programs in the state of Minnesota. It also contains information on the following variables discussed in this report: Geographical location (by Parent Aware pilot area, county, or city), child enrollment, programs serving children receiving CCAP, programs serving ELL children, accreditation status, program affiliations, hours of care, turnover, and weekly rates charged by age group for each program. Accreditation status is updated twice a year (in late June and in December), rates information is updated once a year (April), and programs are added to the dataset on an ongoing basis. An updated dataset is sent to Child Trends quarterly. Data presented in this report represent information for a specific point in time, which is noted in each table. This data was downloaded from NACCRRAware in November 2012.

Interview to clarify new processes and procedures for Year 2: A member of the Parent Aware team at the Minnesota Department of Human Services was interviewed on 1/09/2013 and provided information about how Parent Aware is addressing challenges described throughout this report. The summary of responses is outlined in Section 5.

Appendix B: Coaching and PD Advising Forms and Tools

Application to Participate in Parent Aware: Fully rated programs that agree to participate in Parent Aware complete an application with information about their program and the children they serve. The Application is used to determine whether the program enters the Building Quality or Parent Aware pathway to rating.

Building Quality Interest Questionnaire: The Building Quality Interest Questionnaire assesses programs' motivation for joining Parent Aware, what they expect to gain from participation, and how working with a coach could best benefit them.

Check-in Conversation Sheet: A tool for coaches to document their check-in conversations with programs. Coaches also use this tool to assess how programs are progressing towards their goals, what specific changes they are making, and what additional support they need to meet their goals.

Coaching Agreement: The Coaching Agreement details a program's responsibilities in the coaching relationship, to include, working with the coach to determine goals, carrying out a plan to achieve those goals, and communicating regularly with the coach. The Quality Coach's responsibilities include helping a program set goals, checking in regularly with the program, and working with the program to develop and reflect on new skills that improve their quality.

Coaching Contact Log: An information sheet where Quality Coaches record information about their visits with programs, the Contact Log includes fields for date, type of contact, contact time, prep time, travel time, purpose of contact, staff included, and notes.

Environment Self-Assessment: The Environment Self-Assessment is a tool completed by fully rated programs in Parent Aware to help them develop improvement goals related to specific indicators where they fall short of the standard.

Goal Worksheet: A tool to document a program's goals for Parent Aware, the steps needed to accomplish those goals, changes needed to make the goals possible, and how progress towards realizing those goals will be measured.

Grant Summary Form: The Grant Summary Form is a request for reimbursement on the part of a program for investments made using quality improvement grant funds. Once it is completed by a program, it is approved by the Quality Coach and PD Coordinator.

Parent Aware Staff Information Worksheet (Center-based programs): This form is completed by fully rated, center-based programs about individual staff members and includes information about their Registry level and hours of training experience for each of the individual indicators with training requirements.

Parent Aware Planning Guide: Programs list the indicators, and their expected strengths and challenges in meeting them, in the Parent Aware Planning Guide.

Parent Aware Quality Checklist: The Parent Aware Quality Checklist is a list of all of the indicators required to meet each star level that is completed by programs considering joining Parent Aware to help them determine what star level they would receive if their rating were issued today.

Parent Aware Technical Assistance Contact Log: An information sheet where coaches log their contact with Parent Aware programs. It includes fields for date, hours spent with a program, coaching focus, activities to monitor progress, resources use, staff involved, and notes.

Participation Agreement: The Parent Aware Participation Agreement briefly outlines the expectations of programs participating in Parent Aware which includes completing the steps in the coaching model on time, joining the MNCPD Registry, and to working with a Quality Coach. In response to completing those activities, programs agree to receive quality improvement funds and be issued a public rating. There are separate agreements for family child care and center-based care.

Portfolio Process: The Portfolio Process includes the Quality Documentation Packet and the Application to Participate in Parent Aware.

Professional Development Advising Contact Log: An information sheet where PD Coordinators log information about their visits with programs, the Contact Log includes fields for date, type of contact, contact time, prep time, travel time, purpose of contact, staff included, and notes.

Progress Worksheet: In this worksheet, programs revisit the goals outlined in the Goal Worksheet to assess their progress in meeting those goals. Each goal is listed followed by information about whether it was met, the time spent on it, and any challenges and decisions encountered in the process of working on a goal.

Quality Documentation Packet: The Quality Documentation Packet (QDP) is completed by programs to provide detailed information about whether they are meeting each of the indicators. Supporting evidential documentation like program forms, fliers, and handbooks are attached to the QDP to demonstrate how programs are implementing the requirements described in the indicators. It is one of the key documents DHS uses to determine programs' star ratings.

Appendix C: Glossary

AFP: Accreditation Facilitation Project

APR: Accelerated Pathways to Rating

CCAP: Child Care Assistance Program

CCR&R: Child Care Resource and Referral System

DHS: Minnesota Department of Human Services

ECIPS: Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

GTCUW: Greater Twin Cities United Way

MDE: Minnesota Department of Education

MDH: Minnesota Department of Health

MNAEYC: Minnesota National Association for the Education of Young Children

MNCPD: Minnesota Center for Professional Development

NACCRRAware: Data system for the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (now called Child Care Aware)

PASR: Parent Aware for School Readiness

QDP: Quality Documentation Packet

QRIS: Quality Rating and Improvement System

RTT-ELC: Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant