

Parent Aware

Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System

Initial Validation Brief

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Parent Aware is Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for early care and education (ECE) programs. The purpose of the Parent Aware Initial Validation Study is to examine the extent to which the rating process and the four star quality ratings that are awarded are fair, accurate and meaningful. The findings will be used to inform improvement of Parent Aware as it continues to expand across Minnesota.

The validation study analyzes multiple sources of evidence including observations of quality in 325 Parent Aware-rated programs and direct assessments of developmental skills in nearly 1,200 children in both the fall and spring of their year before kindergarten. The study was conducted with all program types participating in Parent Aware: licensed family child care programs and child care centers (including those with national accreditation), Head Start programs, and school-based prekindergarten programs. Approximately two-thirds of the children in the study are from low-income families (with incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level).



The findings address the effectiveness of the rating tool overall, the Accelerated Pathway to Rating process offering a Four-Star rating for programs that meet external quality standards aligned with Parent Aware, and the rating process for different program types.

- Results of analyses on observed program quality and children's development provide positive support for the validity of the Parent Aware ratings in supporting meaningful quality differences that are related to children's development in expected ways.
- Overall, the Accelerated Pathway to Rating (APR) process appears to function effectively to identify programs that engage in practices to support school readiness, particularly for low-income children. APR Four-Star programs and Three- and Four-Star fully-rated programs both engage in quality practices, according to the observational data and findings on children's development.
- Prior to receiving their rating, Three- and Four-Star fully rated center-based programs are eligible to receive coaching on the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS), a tool that emphasizes the quality of teacher-child interactions. These programs had higher scores on the Instructional Support dimension of the CLASS, a finding which demonstrates the potential benefits of investments in coaching to support improvement in practices that promote children's school readiness.

- Children in Parent Aware-rated programs made gains from fall to spring of their pre-kindergarten year on skills that are critical for their school readiness: math skills, language and literacy skills, social competence, persistence and executive function. Gains in language and literacy and executive function were greater for children from low-income families than for children from higher-income families, though spring scores for low-income children were still equal to or lower than fall scores for higher-income children.
- Further research is needed to identify gaps and opportunities for strengthening the rating process and incentive structure for family child care programs.

The results of the initial validation study are limited to 3- and 4-year-old preschool children. Future research should address the experiences of infants and toddlers in Parent Aware-rated programs. In addition, the study was conducted early in Parent Aware statewide implementation (primarily 2013-2015). Enrollment of programs and children in the study reflected program participation in Parent Aware at the time the study was conducted; it is expected that patterns of program participation will change over time and will include a greater proportion of programs in the full rating pathway.

Overall, the results of the initial validation study suggest that Parent Aware has integrity as a framework for building and connecting efforts to support all types of early care and education programs in Minnesota. The findings can be used to refine the system and to chart a course for the future. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to support continuous improvement and to ensure that Parent Aware is achieving its goals for Minnesota's children and families.