

Pathways to Quality

Parent Aware Retention Incentives



Think Small and Generation Next implemented the Parent Aware Retention Incentive program in early 2017. The purpose of the incentive is to acknowledge and reward Parent Aware-rated licensed family child care providers in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul for their commitment to quality as measured by Parent Aware. The retention incentives are tiered so that higher-rated providers receive a larger incentive: 3- and 4-star programs receive \$1,000 per year, and 1- and 2-star programs receive \$500 per year. The retention incentive is made in two payments, half in January and half in July. In addition, unlike the state Quality Improvement grants, these incentives are not reimbursements for expenses already incurred but are intentionally set up to support providers in whatever way they choose.

► What is the Problem?



There has been a steady decline in the number of family child care programs in Minneapolis and St. Paul (from 459 in December 2014 to 392 in June 2017). In January 2017, we saw the smallest cohort of providers entering Parent Aware in the history of the program. In addition, we started hearing that highly-rated licensed family child care providers in Minneapolis and St. Paul were choosing to leave Parent Aware due to a lack of financial supports. These trends are particularly concerning because the metro area has a significant number of family child care providers of color and new immigrant providers, who often serve populations with limited resources and opportunities.

► What Caused the Problem?

We discovered that some licensed family child care providers who had earned the highest Parent Aware rating were choosing not to re-rate due to a lack of financial assistance to offset the costs of maintaining their Parent Aware rating. This lack of financial assistance is the result of two state policies. First, 4-star Parent Aware programs are not eligible for state Parent Aware Quality Improvement grants because these cost-reimbursable grants are tied to improving, not sustaining, the quality of programs. In addition, the two financial supports available to 4-star programs—eligibility to receive families with Early Learning Scholarships and higher reimbursement rates through the Child Care Assistance Program—both have significant waiting lists. As a result, the state's highest Parent Aware programs may be receiving little to no financial support as intended.

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► Why is This a Problem?

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, we know that family-based child care is often the choice for families with limited financial means and those looking for providers that reflect their culture and race/ethnicity. Having high-quality programs that meet families' needs is particularly important in addressing the opportunity gaps in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Not retaining our high-quality providers and not getting providers to join Parent Aware limits our ability to address the significant opportunity gaps in Minneapolis and St. Paul with proven strategies.

► What Has the Response Been?

When surveyed, **100%** of the providers who responded said they **looked forward** to receiving the Parent Aware Retention Incentive and **89%** said that it **encouraged** them to retain their Parent Aware rating. Here's what was shared:

“Getting the retention bonus has helped me feel as though all the hours of hard work that I've put into doing great things to improve the children's learning environment, the materials they play with, and the insane amount of training I've taken on my personal time, has finally paid off for me a little bit. It's like I finally get a 'Yay Me' award. So many programs are only focused on the children, without any consideration for the hard work, time, stress, and effort put forth by the child care provider to provide all these great things for the best interest of the children.”

“I was able to take a couple of days off over the summer to get out of town and just relax my mind, which was very helpful for me to clear my mind and return fresh.”

“It allowed me to have extra money for bills and child care materials.”

► Any Other Benefits?

We went from having the smallest cohort of programs signing up for Parent Aware in January 2017 to the highest ever in July 2017, the very next cohort! We also saw the state increase its Quality Improvement grants from \$1,000 to \$2,500 per program per year. We think both of these developments were prompted in part by our intervention.

► How Was This Funded?

Through the support of the Bush Foundation, Think Small and Generation Next have focused efforts on increasing the percentage of licensed family child care providers achieving a 3- or 4-star Parent Aware rating in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. This targeted approach is in response to the very low percentage of rated licensed family child care providers in general and the knowledge that many of the children and families that are mostly likely to be affected by opportunity and achievement gaps are utilizing licensed family child care providers.

► What is Parent Aware?



Parent Aware is Minnesota's voluntary, 4-star Quality Rating and Improvement System, focused on (1) providing a framework for early childhood professionals to increase their confidence and competence in supporting children's school readiness and (2) supporting families in their search for high-quality early childhood programs that meet their needs. Based on research and evaluation, Parent Aware is developed to support the individual needs of children, their families, and the early childhood professionals serving them to ensure that every child has the experiences needed to be ready for both school and life. Parent Aware provides early childhood professionals with coaching, professional development advising, and financial assistance to support their efforts to increase their quality.