

Pathways to Quality

Focus on Licensed Family Child Care



▶ Project Description



Parent Aware, Minnesota’s early learning quality framework, allows all types of early care and education programs to voluntarily receive a quality rating based on the extent to which they adhere to practices that best prepare children for kindergarten. However, many licensed family child care providers do not have the necessary resources to navigate the process of receiving, maintaining, or improving a Parent Aware rating. As we think about the need for high-quality early care and educational options for families most likely to be impacted by the opportunity gap, the need for a robust market of high-quality family child care providers becomes more essential.

The Pathways to Quality project was born out of a need to assist family child care providers so they can provide more children with the opportunity to be successful when they enter kindergarten.

▶ Results

1. How much did we do? (How many sessions, how many providers impacted, how many attendees, etc.)

See question below.

2. How well did we do it?

Our Bush Pathways to Quality Goal is to increase % of 3-4 Star Rated Programs by end of 3 year grant period:

- Licensed Family Child Care (LFCC) from 7% (baseline from proposal) to 24%
- Centers from 38% to 47%
- Additional 1,700 high-quality slots for families most likely affected by the achievement gap

Progress to date:

As of January 2018 :	Target:	Actual:
LFCC	19%	16%
CCC	47%	46%
Increased Number of High Quality Slots	1,250	5,165

3. Is anyone better off? Why?

All providers have received support via the Parent Aware recruiter and coaches. Without this additional support, sustainability would be difficult.



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► Challenges/Opportunities

While Think Small fell slightly short of its targets for highly-rated programs, there has been a significant increase in the number of high-quality slots. The context for the numbers is important. During the grant period, there was significant “churn” in the early childhood education system, with large numbers of licensed family child care programs closing (including some highly-rated programs). The trend of program closures is occurring statewide. During this time, we also noticed that more center-based programs were opening, which helps to explain why the target for high-rated programs was missed and the target for high-quality slots was exceeded.



Think Small surveyed programs that had closed over the past two years to learn more about the challenges they faced. Thirty-six percent of programs closed due to business reasons. There is a national trend of communities lacking the necessary supply of quality early childhood education slots. Further compounding this problem are barriers for families to access the programs including weekly costs and travel. These gaps are sometimes referred to as “child care deserts” and the issue is gaining statewide and national attention. Pathways to Quality is adjusting activities/strategies to tackle these issues, focusing not only on helping existing programs achieve high-quality, but also increasing the supply by supporting programs in opening and/or expanding. This should also help families access programs.

In an effort to reduce the high closure rate, Think Small offered financial incentives to rated programs in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. A total of 112 programs received 226 payments totaling \$109,000 as of January 2018. As a result, the Department of Human Services increased its Quality Improvement grants from \$1,000 to \$2,500 per program, per year. This also led to the largest cohort of programs signing up for Parent Aware in July 2017.

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► Next Steps

Next steps include continuing to support LFCCs through their Parent Aware journey, while at the same time focusing on the business stability of programs. This new focus will include working with existing providers to expand their programs, as well as supporting new providers entering the field.

