

Pathways to Quality

Parent Aware Retention Incentives



► Project Description

Think Small and Generation Next implemented the Parent Aware Retention Incentive program in early 2017. The purpose of the incentive is to retain 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. Tiered retention incentives mean 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 was 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. As we realized the impacts of significant program closures, we needed to stabilize and maintain high quality programs.

► Impact

After implementing the Parent Aware Retention Incentives for two years for 87 programs, 80% maintained their rating and stayed in business, 9% went out of business, and 11% dropped their rating. Thirty programs applied for retention incentives but did not qualify. Of those 30 programs, 47% went out of business and 17% dropped their ratings. Before implementing the incentives, the January 2017 cohort had the fewest number of providers signed up. After implementing the incentives, the next cohort in July 2017 had the largest cohort number of providers signed up. As they continue to work on increasing the number of Parent Aware providers, the Department of Human Services closely watched the Parent Aware incentives. This project resulted in the state increasing its Quality Improvement grants from \$1,000 to \$2,500 per program per year. When surveyed, 100% of the providers who responded said that they looked forward to receiving the Parent Aware Retention Incentive, and 89% said that it encouraged them to retain their Parent Aware rating.

“ 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.”

continued on next page >



► Ability to Scale

Retaining providers in Parent Aware through financial incentives can be scalable with DHS administrative policy changes that prioritize retention of Parent Aware rated providers. In addition, supporting provider incentives can be achieved through increased funding of the states REETAIN program. Think Small supports legislation in the 2019 session to double the states allocation to this effort.

► Next Steps

Continue to seek wage supports/incentives to recruit and retain high quality 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.



To learn more about Pathways to Quality, visit ThinkSmall.org/pathways