



EMPOWERING EDUCATORS.
CHAMPIONING EARLY LEARNERS.

Barriers to Breakthrough Webinar

Questions & Answers

Big Picture and Purpose

Q: What is the WeVision Minnesota report, and why was it created?

A: WeVision Minnesota is a report with recommendations resulting from a months-long engagement process with early educators and leaders from the field. It was written for legislators, state agency leaders, staff, and others in positions where they are making decisions about the state's early care and education system. It is not a program, accreditation, or system that providers enroll in. There is nothing to join, and nothing changes about child care licensing, Parent Aware, or other aspects of child care operations today because of this report.

The report was created because Minnesota's early care and education system is not working well for children, families, or educators: families pay high costs and still struggle to find dependable care, providers face complex and punitive rules, and children's opportunities are still shaped by income and zip code. The goal is to stop "tinkering around the edges" and instead design a more coherent, fair, and sustainable system that reflects what families and educators say they need.

Q: How does this work relate to the Great Start Task Force, Parent Aware redesign, and licensing modernization?

A: The framework presented is meant to build on, not replace, earlier work. The Great Start Task Force set a blueprint and called for access to "effective programs" but did not spell out what that looks like in practice; the WeVision Minnesota process filled in that gap with a concrete structure for quality, governance, and supports. It also connects to Parent Aware redesign and licensing modernization by proposing how quality and licensing can be reorganized and simplified, using those efforts as scaffolding rather than starting from scratch.

Q: Who was involved in developing these recommendations?

A: Nearly 40 early educators, family child care leaders, center leaders, and other experts met monthly over a seven-month period, did homework between meetings, and co-created the recommendations; their voices are at the heart of the report. Think Small also engaged about 900 people through focus



groups, surveys, roundtables, conferences, and community events, including parents, tribally licensed providers, Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) navigators, and others.

Q: Is this a state agency initiative? Were national accrediting bodies involved?

A: Think Small received a grant from the Bainum Family Foundation to facilitate this process, it is not a state agency initiative. The Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) did not drive this process, but information was provided to them along the way. National organizations like NAFCC and NAEYC were not part of the process, though national accreditations are mentioned as one option among multiple quality recognition pathways providers could choose under these recommendations. The report reflects input from the Minnesota early childhood education community about what could be different, not a top-down mandate from any single organization.

Understanding Licensing and Quality

Q: Do the recommendations mean having a license isn't "quality"?

A: Absolutely not. What the report says is that licensing should focus on what it does well: ensuring health and safety. In programs that are licensed for health and safety, the state is assuring that the program is healthy and safe. It will be up to families to determine if they see the quality that is important to them in that program. It does not mean that a program that is licensed for health and safety is not quality, it means the program has not gone through a formal quality pathway to have its quality recognized by the state. This framework is about clarity for families (What has been checked? And by whom?). For more information on this look at the section "Three Options for Families."

Q: Does this mean licensing is a guarantee of quality?

A: No. One of the core messages is that licensing should be understood as a health and safety "floor," not a promise of quality. Families told the project team that they often assume licensing to mean that a program offers a certain level of quality care. This is despite the fact that many quality-related rules within our current licensing standards are weakly connected to children's experiences and are enforced inconsistently. In the new framework, licensed status clearly means the program has met health and safety standards; any additional quality recognition is separate and clearly labeled so families know exactly what it means.

Q: What does "right-sizing" licensing mean?

A: "Right-sizing" means narrowing licensing to what it can do best—protect children's health and safety—while moving quality expectations into a separate, growth-oriented system overseen by a board made up of those closest to young children. Many providers described licensing today as a confusing mix of safety rules and quality rules, enforced punitively and inconsistently, which takes time away from children and adds stress without always improving experiences. Under the new model:

→ Step 1 is a clear, consistent health and safety license.

- Step 2 is choosing, pursuing, and being supported through a quality pathway if a program wants to be recognized as an Early Care and Education Program.

The Three Options for Families

Q: What are the three options for families in the proposed system?

A: The framework offers three clear choices:

- **Trusted Caregivers:** Family, friend and neighbor care, nannies, au pairs, and similar arrangements that families choose and oversee; some public funding can support these choices, but they are not formally regulated. Families judge health, safety, and quality.
- **Health and Safety Licensed Programs:** Programs that meet streamlined licensing rules focused on health and safety; families judge quality in these settings, it is not assured by a third party.
- **Recognized Early Care and Education Programs:** Licensed programs in homes, centers, or schools that meet quality standards set by the field and receive funding sufficient to provide high-quality early learning and fair pay.

Q: How will parents know which programs are high quality? Isn't this putting too much on families?

A: Today, families already shoulder most of the burden of figuring out quality, often with confusing or limited information. Under this framework, parents still make the final choice, but the labels and expectations are clearer:

- "Health and safety licensed" tells families that basic safety standards are met, and they should use their own judgment about quality.
- "Recognized Early Care and Education Program" tells families that the program has completed a rigorous, field-approved quality pathway with independent validation, and they can look up what that recognition entails.

This clarity reduces guesswork and makes it more transparent when parents are choosing a program that has been verified to have gone above and beyond health and safety.

Q: How does this framework treat family, friend and neighbor (trusted caregiver) care?

A: Trusted caregivers are explicitly named, respected, and included as one of the three core options, rather than treated as a lesser or hidden part of the system. Families choose these caregivers, define what health, safety, and quality looks like for them, and can receive some public support while still carrying responsibility for oversight. The framework does not try to regulate every informal relationship; instead, it is honest with families about where the state provides regulation and where families take the lead.

The Proposed Board and Governance

Q: What is the proposed Minnesota Board of Early Care and Education, and why is it needed?

A: The recommendations call for a new state-level public board where those closest to children, like family child care providers, center-based educators, parents, and community experts hold real decision-making power over educator standards, quality pathways, and supports. Providers described feeling "shut out" in our current system: they are often asked to share input but see decisions made elsewhere disconnected from what is actually happening in classrooms and homes. The board is intended to shift from one-time task forces and after-the-fact fights to an ongoing, standing body that can set expectations, and adjust over time.

Q: Who controls what "quality" means?

A: This is one of the most important parts of the framework. The report recommends that the field-led Minnesota Board of Early Care and Education where educators, program leaders, families, and others share real authority control what "quality" means in Minnesota. The board is intended to move Minnesota toward transparent governance where providers and families are in the room when decisions are made.

Q: What would this Board actually do?

A: The report proposes that the Board would:

- Set expectations for educators and program leaders.
- Approve multiple quality recognition pathways (national accreditations and flexible, field-developed models) that meet shared criteria.
- Guide and oversee supports such as coaching, training, and grants so they are coherent, high-impact, and aligned with the new pathways.
- Monitor and publicly report on child outcomes, program supply, and workforce stability, and advise on policy and investment decisions.

This is like how other professions operate: for example, nurses and doctors have boards that set standards and help maintain public trust, in partnership with state government.

Q: Who would serve on the Board, and how would appointments work?

A: The recommendations specify a state-level board made up of those closest to children, family child care providers, center leaders and staff, parents, and other early care and education experts like pediatricians or those working to prepare people for careers in early care and education. The exact appointment process and allocation of seats would be worked out in legislation.

Quality Recognition Pathways

Q: Is this Parent Aware 2.0?

A: No. Participants in the process were very clear that they did not want this system to grow into another version of Parent Aware. That is why this report proposes something different.

Participants in the process shared that they want to move away from:

- Time-consuming, paperwork-driven processes
- Ratings that don't reflect real practice, especially the unique way that quality looks in licensed family child care and other community-driven programs

What this framework proposes instead:

- Decision-making through a field-led board
- Multiple pathways to recognized quality (not one standardized rating), including pathways that honor models that do not fit neatly into already established boxes
- Quality defined by the field, not agencies
- Growth-oriented supports, not punitive compliance models

The key difference: This framework proposes that providers and others closest to families and children identify the multiple pathways to quality recognition and participate in governing the field in the same way that other professionals play that role for their industries.

Q: What are "multiple pathways to recognition," and why are they important?

A: Multiple pathways mean there is more than one credible way to demonstrate quality, as long as all pathways meet shared criteria: field-led, holistic standards, comparable evidence, and independent validation as determined by the proposed "Minnesota Board of Early Care and Education". Examples include:

- National accreditations
- Alternative pathways designed by Minnesota's field

This flexibility addresses common problems with current systems: some high-quality programs are shut out or mis-rated because they do not fit a rigid template, while other programs can "check boxes" on paper without delivering the same depth of quality as their peers who aren't rated. The new model aims to align recognition more closely with what families and providers recognize as real quality in daily practice.

Q: How do nature-based, rural, and culturally specific programs fit into this?

A: These are exactly the kinds of programs that struggle under the "one right way" system that currently exists. For example, current licensing rules require specific materials that could be unrealistic for a nature-based, outdoor program. Other rules make it hard for programs geographically based on a farm to offer farm experiences. By right-sizing licensing to core health and safety and moving quality expectations into pathways with greater flexibility, the framework makes more room for programs to show excellence in ways that fit their setting and culture while still meeting shared industry standards. That nature-based program, for instance, could pursue a recognized nature accreditation that the board has vetted, and a rural or culturally grounded program could follow a pathway that reflect its community's strengths instead of trying to retrofit into a checklist designed for a different type of program.

Supports and Implementation

Q: Will programs still receive coaching and other supports?

A: Yes. Coaching, mentoring, peer networks, and professional development were among the most valued supports mentioned in the educator workgroups, and they are central to the idea of "growth-oriented accountability." The recommendation is not to remove any supports but to increase clarity for providers by:

- Mapping all current supports.
- Focusing resources on a smaller set of high-impact strategies.
- Aligning those supports with the new pathways so that, for example, programs working toward accreditation or alternative pathways can get more on-demand help.

Q: What is happening to ratio rules?

A: Ratios remain part of the health and safety floor: they are one of the ways licensing ensures children are physically safe and supervised. The workgroup members emphasized that ratios are overly simplistic and ideally would consider the individual needs of the children in a group and the adult's preparation, and that the state should focus on the strongest research-based safety requirements and implement them consistently. Details about exact ratios and any changes would be worked out in future legislation and rulemaking, informed by the Board and by modernization work already underway.

Q: How do Head Start and school-based programs fit into this framework?

A: The WeVision model is "building-type neutral": Head Start, school-based pre-K, centers, and family child care homes can all be part of the same mixed-delivery system and can all become recognized Early Care and Education Programs. For example, Office of Head Start standards could be one quality recognition pathway. The goal is to have shared, field-shaped standards across settings so families can compare options more easily.

Q: How would care for medically fragile children or children with special needs fit into this model?

A: There were specific conversations in the workgroups about additional supports going above and beyond basic quality recognition pathways that Minnesota would want to see in its system, and children with special needs was one of the specific examples that came up frequently. The framework would allow for thinking about creating differentiated standards or identifying a unique pathway for programs that want to provide specialized service children with special needs, via the Board.

Funding and Financial Impacts

Q: Will funding be different for programs that are licensed vs. recognized?

A: The recommendation is to better align public funding with what each option is asked to deliver:

- Health and Safety Licensed programs would be funded to meet licensing requirements.

- Recognized Early Care and Education Programs that choose to pursue a quality pathway would be funded for the costs associated with establishing and sustaining quality.

This matters because right now, programs are often expected to deliver comprehensive quality on a basic licensing budget. The report says that's not fair. If a program chooses to take on additional quality obligations, they should be funded for it.

Q: Where would the funding for all this come from? Is this realistic in a time of fraud concerns and tight budgets?

A: The framework assumes that funding would come from public investment, just as it does today but that that funding would be used more clearly and effectively. Some existing funds (like those supporting Parent Aware and various supports) could be realigned to fit the new structure, and additional dollars would be needed to:

- Pay programs enough to deliver quality, not just meet minimum safety.
- Ensure fair earnings for educators and small business owners.
- Help more families afford care through Great Start Scholarships or similar tools.

Fraud concerns make clear accountability even more important; having a Board, recognized pathways, and transparent reporting is intended to strengthen public trust by showing where money goes and what it accomplishes.

Parent Aware and Scholarships

Q: What happens to Parent Aware in this framework?

A: If the recommendations move forward, Parent Aware would eventually be phased out and replaced by the new recognition system. This would not be an overnight change; there would be a planned transition period so programs and families are supported, and existing strengths like coaching would be carried forward and improved, not abandoned. The core shift is that quality standards and pathways would be set and overseen by the new Board, with multiple pathways available, instead of a single state-designed rating structure.

Q: What about Early Learning Scholarships, Child Care Assistance, and Great Start Scholarships?

A: The recommendations themselves do not redesign family funding, but they assume and support the move already in law toward a single "Great Start Scholarships" approach that blends Child Care Assistance (CCAP) and state Early Learning Scholarships behind the scenes. For families, the goal is one application and one clear funding stream, not two separate systems to navigate; for policymakers, the framework gives a clearer structure for directing those dollars toward health and safety, recognized quality, and fair compensation.

Timing, Change, and What Happens Next

Q: What is the timeline for changes? When would this actually affect providers?

A: There is no fixed timeline in the recommendations; implementation will depend on legislative action. For licensing modernization, the state agency has proposed at least a one-year delay between passing legislation and implementing changes, to allow for training and consistent rollout. Creating the Board, defining recognition pathways, and realigning supports would be a multi-year, phased effort, with plenty of public input along the way.

Q: Why now? We're already overwhelmed.

A: We hear you. Licensing modernization, Parent Aware redesign, other pressures—it's all real. The truth is that this report didn't create the pressure. The pressure is coming from:

- Significant increases in public investment (which brings accountability expectations)
- Calls for increased oversight of public investments overall (creating political pressure for more clarity and accountability)
- Growing momentum for universal child care and universal pre-k systems nationally
- Systems already changing (licensing rewrite, Parent Aware redesign)

The status quo is not an option that's available. Change is already in motion.

Q: Providers have already gone through a lot of change. Why make another big shift now?

A: Workgroup members were very candid that change fatigue is real, many have lived through "renovating the same house" over and over as existing rules and systems have shifted. The argument for this framework is that it builds a new, sturdier foundation and "block" instead of doing endless patch jobs: one clear health and safety floor, field-led quality pathways, and supports aligned to what children, families, and educators actually need. Given the current crisis—closures, workforce stress, and temporary funding falling away—participants felt this is the moment to put the field and families in the driver's seat for the next generation of reforms, rather than waiting for another top-down redesign.

Q: What happens next?

A: These are recommendations for the field, legislators, and policymakers. Nothing happens automatically. Any future policy would require:

- Legislative action and public process
- If the report's recommendations are followed, the first step would be establishing a state Board
- Your continued voice and engagement to shape whether, when, and how any of this moves forward

Q: How can I give feedback, ask more questions, or stay involved?

A: We want to hear from you.

- Email your questions or concerns to: policy@thinksmall.org
- Request a presentation or opportunity to talk directly: policy@thinksmall.org