



WILDER RESEARCH, CHILD TRENDS, SRI INTERNATIONAL,  
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# Parent Aware: Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot



## Summary of the Parent Aware Year 2 Evaluation Report

This fact sheet highlights findings from the Year 2 Evaluation of Parent Aware which examines 18 months of implementation from July, 2008 through December, 2009. Child Trends examined administrative data, analyzed project documents, participated in implementation and policy meetings and conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including members of the Parent Aware Implementation Team, legislators, and staff from agencies that support early care and education programs. Selected parents of children in Parent-Aware rated programs completed telephone interviews.

### What is Parent Aware?

Parent Aware is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early care and education programs including licensed family child care programs, child care centers, Head Start, and School Readiness programs. It is being piloted in four Minnesota communities including the city of Minneapolis, the city of Saint Paul, the Wayzata school district, and Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. **Over 300 early care and education programs serving over 20,000 children are participating in Parent Aware.**

The primary purpose of Parent Aware is to support parents by providing information about the quality of early care and education programs. Parent Aware uses ratings to recognize quality and promotes quality improvement using a variety of resources. Together, these strategies aimed at parents and early care and education programs target an ultimate goal of improving children's school readiness.

### How are ratings assigned to early care and education programs?

Programs submit documentation and receive visits from trained observers using nationally-recognized scales that measure their environment, practices, and interactions with children. Programs are awarded one to four stars depending upon the number of points earned in four categories that research indicates have significant influence on children's school readiness:

- Family Partnerships
- Teaching Materials and Strategies
- Tracking Learning
- Teacher Training and Education

Accredited child care centers, accredited family child care programs, School Readiness Programs and Head Start programs are awarded a 4-star rating automatically if they demonstrate compliance with licensing, current accreditation status and/or compliance with program requirements.

### How do parents learn about the ratings?

Ratings are posted on the Parent Aware website ([www.parentawareratings.org](http://www.parentawareratings.org)). Parents can search for programs by pilot area. Parents can also search the site in a variety of languages including English, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali.

### How is implementation progressing?

As of December 2009, 318 programs have a Parent Aware rating, a 34% increase over the prior year.

- The majority of rated programs are automatically-rated 4-star programs including accredited child care centers and family child care programs (162), Head Start programs (23) and School Readiness programs (51) plus 2 provisionally rated programs.
- 80 programs currently have full ratings.



For a full report of these findings, please see

**Evaluation of Parent Aware: Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot.  
Year 2 Evaluation Report.**

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### What is the experience of families and programs with Parent Aware?

- About 20% of parents had heard of Parent Aware in the Fall of 2008. Parents report hearing about their current programs primarily through word-of-mouth.
- Parents report choosing programs because they believe they are high quality (29%) or because they are conveniently located (19%) or affordable (3%).
- Parents rate social interaction as slightly more important than academic aspects of their program, although both are perceived as important.
- Nearly all center-based directors and about half of family child care providers report an overall positive impression of Parent Aware. The majority of respondents in these groups say that Parent Aware has been beneficial for their program.

### What do stakeholders say is the most important impact of Parent Aware?

- Parent Aware has brought the issue of quality to the forefront for programs, parents, policymakers and for the early childhood system.
- Parent Aware has “sparked conversation” and “gotten people talking about quality” and about “what the next stage is for early education.”



### What do we know about programs in Parent Aware?

- Of the 80 fully-rated programs, 25% of programs received 4 stars, 41% received 3 stars, 30% received 2 stars, and 4% received 1 star.
- Programs score higher, on average, in the Family Partnerships category.
- Programs score lower, on average, in the Tracking Learning category.
- An overview of survey data reveals that ratings scores do not always reflect programs' self-report of performance on quality indicators. This suggests that Parent Aware is using rigorous criteria to assess quality.
- 32 programs have been re-rated (an annual requirement for programs participating in the pilot). Overall, 82% of child care centers and 90% of family child care programs *increased* their star rating.
- 53% of all re-rated programs moved up to a 4-star rating.

### Looking ahead to statewide implementation of Parent Aware, stakeholders believe:

- The rating process needs to be assessed and improved based on evaluation findings.
- The capacity to provide quality improvement resources such as curriculum training and consultation needs to increase.
- Strategies for tailoring Parent Aware to different geographic areas and types of programs should be considered.



### Next Steps

Child Trends will produce a final report on the Parent Aware pilot in October, 2010 that will analyze the effectiveness of the rating tool used to assign stars to early care and education programs as well as the linkages between a child's participation in a Parent Aware rated program and gains in school readiness.

