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Evaluation of Parent Aware: Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot

**Final Report Summary
December, 2011**



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Parent Aware: Minnesota's QRIS

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/areas including the city of Minneapolis, the city of Saint Paul, the Wayzata school district, and Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties.

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 provide evidence of their quality and earn points in four areas:

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

Programs submit documentation and supporting materials for each area. They receive an on-site observation and are scored on nationally-recognized scales that measure their environment, practices and interactions with children. They are assigned one to four stars depending upon the number of points earned.

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 current accreditation status, compliance with licensing, or compliance with applicable state or federal program performance standards.

How do parents learn about the ratings?

Ratings are posted on the Parent Aware website (www.parentawareratings.org). Parents can search for programs by pilot area and in a variety of languages including English, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. They can also call their local child care resource and referral agency for assistance.

What information has been learned from the evaluation of Parent Aware?

Evaluation reports have been produced by Child Trends for each year of the pilot. The reports and two-page fact sheets from the first three years of the pilot can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/melfreports>

Parent Aware

Minnesota's pilot Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) – Parent Aware – completed its fourth and final pilot year at the end of June, 2011. A QRIS is a strategy used by over half of the states to measure, rate, improve, and communicate information about the quality of early care and education programs. To date, Parent Aware is the only QRIS nationally that includes the term “parent” in its name. Throughout the pilot, an intentional focus has been placed on developing and promoting a rating tool that will be useful to parents and that will support their early care and education decisions. Similar to other QRIS, Parent Aware also promotes and facilitates program quality improvement by providing on-site support and by linking programs to training and other resources. This two-pronged strategy aimed at parents and at early care and education programs targets the ultimate goal of improving children's school readiness, particularly for those children who are at-risk of beginning kindergarten behind their peers. The purpose of the final Evaluation report of the pilot is: (1) to provide an assessment of Parent Aware and its outcomes at the end of the pilot, and (2) to use the results of the evaluation to inform planning for the next phase of Parent Aware implementation. This report is a summary of a more detailed Technical Report available at <http://tinyurl.com/melfreports>.

Parent Aware and other QRIS nationwide were created in response to the growing body of evidence indicating that high quality experiences in early care and education can promote positive outcomes for young children. The research also documents low- to moderate-levels of quality across a variety of early care and education settings, which prompted the QRIS focus on quality improvement, particularly in settings serving low-income children, as a strategy to support children's school readiness.

Evaluation of Parent Aware

In 2007, the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation contracted with Child Trends to conduct an evaluation of the Parent Aware pilot. The goal of the evaluation was to address a set of comprehensive questions about implementation of Parent Aware and initial outcomes of the pilot. The issues that have been analyzed by the Evaluation include: stakeholder perceptions of the potential of Parent Aware to achieve its stated goals; patterns of enrollment by program type; density of program participation; distribution of programs across rating levels; trends in re-rating of programs; validation of the Parent Aware Rating Tool including an examination of linkages between Parent Aware quality measures and children's developmental outcomes; parents' perceptions of quality early care and education; parents' awareness of Parent Aware; programs' experiences in Parent Aware; and provision and outcomes of quality improvement supports. Outcomes are examined at multiple levels including the early childhood system, early childhood programs, practitioners, families and children.

The Evaluation uses multiple methods and data sources to address the key research questions. Administrative data are used to describe the early care and education market, the ratings that

programs achieve, and the services and resources that have been delivered or disbursed to Parent Aware participants. Semi-structured surveys and interviews are conducted with Parent Aware program participants and families. Direct assessments of children’s language and math development are administered to preschool-age children, and teacher/provider reports of children’s social-emotional development and approaches to learning are collected.

The Parent Aware Evaluation Final Report addresses seven broad questions:

1. What is the legislative and community context for the Parent Aware pilot in the final year?
2. Have programs enrolled in Parent Aware, and do the pilot communities experience an increase in high quality programs?
3. What is the risk status of children served in Parent Aware-rated programs?
4. What are programs’ experiences in Parent Aware?
5. What quality improvement supports are provided, and do programs improve when they are re-rated?
6. What can be learned about the Parent Aware Rating Tool and process through validation analyses that examine how Parent Aware rating levels are related to observed quality?
7. What can be learned about the Parent Aware Rating Tool and process through validation analyses that assess whether children in Parent Aware-rated programs experience developmental gains in key school readiness domains and whether the gains can be linked to the star level (or other quality feature) of their early care and education program?

Each of these questions is addressed briefly in this Final Report Summary with an overview of key findings and figures and recommendations to consider for statewide implementation.

Legislative and Community Context

In preparation for the conclusion of the pilot at the end of June, 2011, many of the Parent Aware administrative and policy activities focused on strategies for ending the pilot and planning for possible expansion of Parent Aware. Other community-based, state and federal activities and initiatives also affected the context of Parent Aware in the last year of the pilot. This section provides a brief overview of these activities.

Key Findings:

- Uncertainty about the outcomes of the 2011 Legislative session created challenges for Parent Aware implementation and planning.
- Plans to expand Parent Aware were included in Minnesota’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge application. These plans include targeted expansion to all of Hennepin and Ramsey counties, the White Earth Reservation and the three counties it covers – Becker, Clearwater and Mahnomen – as well as Itasca County.

- Quality improvement efforts were launched during the pilot to align with and support Parent Aware including the Building Quality initiative, Getting Ready, the Child Care Accreditation Project and the Minnesota Child Care Credential. Some of these efforts will continue and others will be revised or adapted for the new Parent Aware context.

Recommendations:

- Continue using systematic strategies for tracking and recording details about the context of Parent Aware and the related quality improvement efforts that emerge in either a parallel or coordinated way to support Parent Aware. These details will be important for documenting the impact of Parent Aware over time.

Program Enrollment, Participation and Ratings

At the conclusion of a voluntary QRIS pilot, it is important to examine the extent to which the program penetrated the early childhood market, expanded the number of rated programs in communities, and included participation across different types of care and education programs.

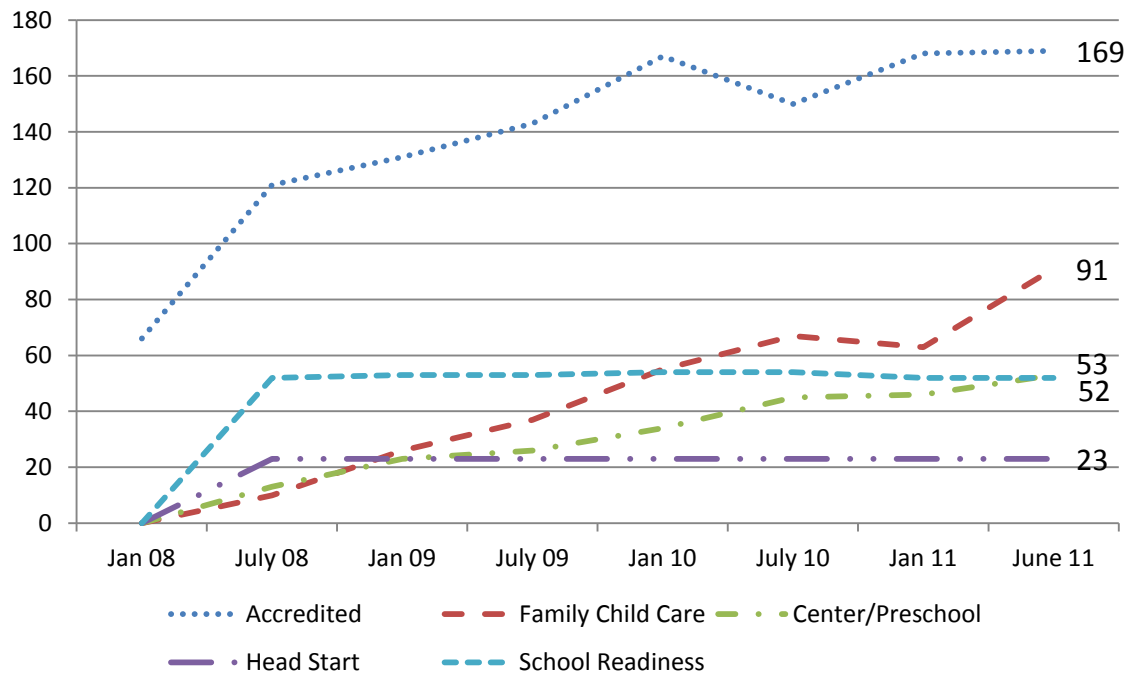
Tracking indicators related to enrollment and rating can aid understanding of implementation and growth of Parent Aware. These indicators include the cumulative number of programs that have received a first or *initial* rating, the number of programs with *current* ratings in Parent Aware (which includes initial ratings and re-ratings), and the percent of eligible programs participating in the pilot. This section provides an overview of key indicators that highlight patterns of enrollment and ratings from the start of Parent Aware through June, 2011.

Key Findings (as of June, 2011):

- 471 early care and education programs had received an initial rating from Parent Aware.
- One-hundred programs received one rating and chose not to pursue a second rating.
- Nearly 400 programs (388 programs) had current Parent Aware ratings (see Figure 1).
- 63% of currently rated programs were automatically-rated programs (accredited programs, School Readiness programs, and Head Start programs) that received a 4-star rating in Parent Aware (because they demonstrate current accreditation status and compliance with licensing, and/or compliance with applicable state or federal program performance standards), 23% were non-accredited family child care programs and 14% were non-accredited center-based programs.
- Most programs with full ratings received a 3- or 4-star rating in the pilot; as of June 2011, 82% of programs received 3- or 4-stars, 15% had 2-stars, and 3% had 1-star (see Figure 2 for the number and type of programs at each star rating).
- 28% of all eligible programs in the pilot areas were participating in Parent Aware.

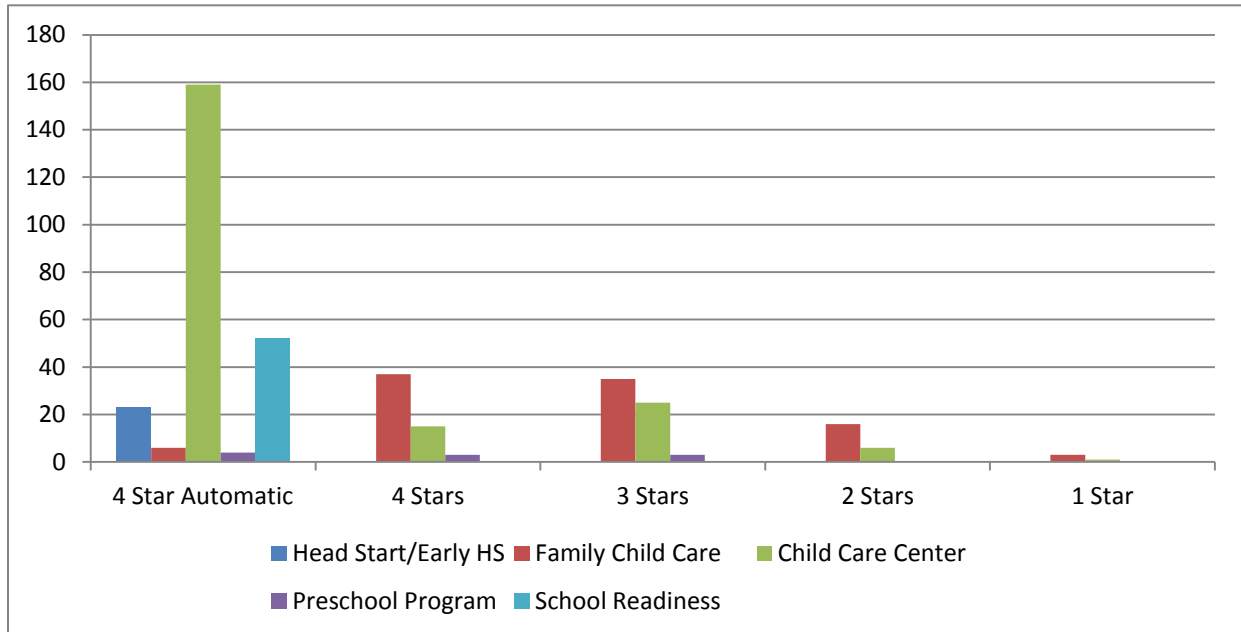
- Within the pilot areas of Saint Paul, Minneapolis, Wayzata School District, and Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties (not including the additional accredited programs in the 7-county metro area), participation rose 3% in the last nine months (from 14% in September, 2010 to 17% in June, 2011).
- Participation of eligible programs in the pilot areas varies by program type: center-based programs (including automatically-rated accredited centers, Head Start programs and School Readiness programs) were participating at a higher rate (63%) than family child care programs (11%).

Figure 1. Total number of current ratings in Parent Aware (as of June, 2011) by date certificate was issued and program type



Source: Parent Aware Rating Tool Database, Minnesota Department of Human Services as of June 30, 2011

Figure 2. Number and type of programs at each star level



Source: Parent Aware Rating Tool Database, Minnesota Department of Human Services as of June 30, 2011

Participation in Parent Aware is growing steadily, but it continues to include a relatively small percentage of non-accredited programs. Participation in Parent Aware is clearly facilitated by the automatic rating process (with a smaller proportion of programs participating in the full rating process). Programs are more likely to be rated at higher quality levels (3- or 4-star ratings) than lower quality levels.

Recommendations:

- The distribution of programs in Parent Aware is heavily weighted toward the upper end of the rating scale. Consider strategies to recruit programs at lower quality levels to increase the diversity of programs included in Parent Aware.
- The density of program participation (calculated as the percentage of eligible programs that have enrolled in Parent Aware) is in the middle range of participation rates seen nationwide in voluntary QRIS. Develop incentives and supports to encourage greater participation across center-based programs and family child care programs.

Risk Status of Children in Parent Aware-Rated Programs

A goal of Parent Aware is to recruit a wide array of programs that are serving children who may be at risk for starting kindergarten not fully prepared because of their family income level or because of their status as English Language Learners. This section provides an overview of the overall number and characteristics of children being served in Parent Aware-rated programs.

Key Findings:

- As of June, 2011, Parent Aware-rated programs served approximately 23,900 children (see Table 1).
- Most of those children are served in accredited child care centers, School Readiness programs, and Head Start programs.
- The majority of children served in Parent Aware-rated programs are preschoolers (62%).
- Although there are more fully-rated family child care programs (91) than fully-rated center-based programs (including child care centers and preschools) (53), more children are served in fully-rated child care centers because these programs have a larger average enrollment.
- Approximately one-third of all children served in Parent Aware-rated programs (including accredited center-based and family child care programs and all fully-rated programs) are receiving subsidies through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). (Data were not available for children in Head Start and School Readiness programs, so subsidy use is underestimated).
- Approximately one-sixth of children served in Parent Aware-rated programs are English Language Learners. (Data were not available for children in Head Start and School Readiness programs, so English Language Learner status is underestimated).

Table 1. Estimated total number of children served in Parent Aware by star level.

Star Level	Average number of children enrolled at each site	Number of programs in Parent Aware	Estimated total number of children served
1 star	15.3	4	61
2 stars	23.3	22	513
3 stars	35.5	63	2,237
4 stars, fully-rated	23.7	55	1,304
4 stars, automatically-rated	81.1	244	19,788

Source: Minnesota NACCRRAware (July 2011), Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties (personal communication, 10/12/11), and the Minnesota Department of Education (personal communication, 10/11/2011)

Recommendations

- Continue to diversify the programs that are enrolled in Parent Aware. Targeted support strategies such as those that were evaluated in the Getting Ready program and that were aimed at recruiting family child care providers and programs serving children who are English Language Learners can be successful in facilitating recruitment of programs serving a higher percentage of children with particular risk factors.

- Automate the process for gathering data on the characteristics of children served in Parent Aware-rated programs. These statistics are included in performance measures proposed for Race to the Top and in new reporting requirements for the federal Child Care and Development Fund program and will need to be tracked on a regular basis.

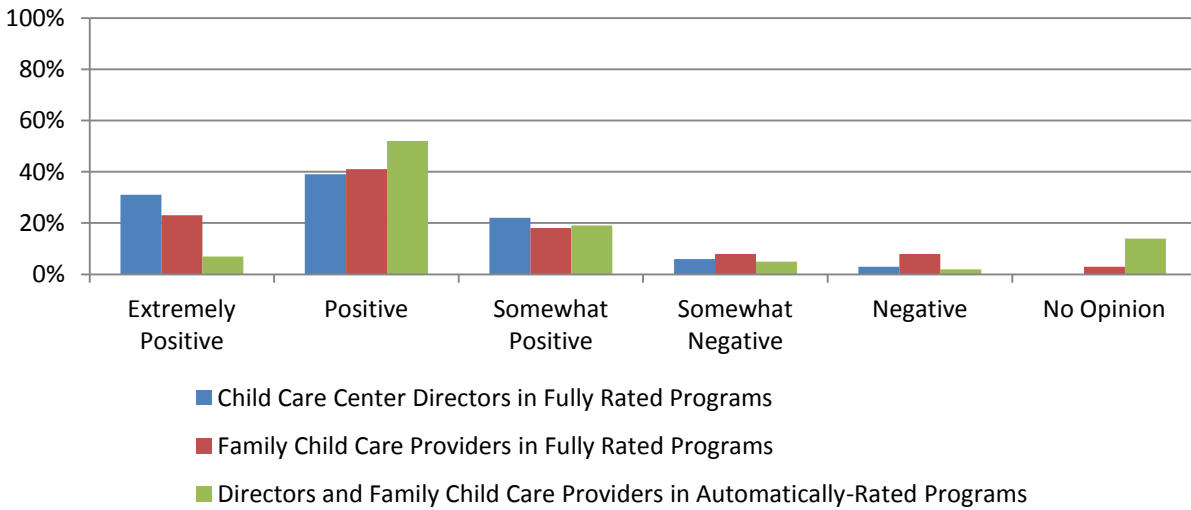
Programs' Experiences in Parent Aware

Programs' experiences in Parent Aware and their perceptions of how beneficial and supportive the program is to their work are important potential predictors of sustained enrollment in the QRIS. This section analyzes programs' responses to survey questions asking them to rate various aspects of their experience and to provide open-ended responses to questions about their perceptions of the program.

Key Findings:

- The majority of program participants report that they have positive impressions of Parent Aware (see Figure 3).
- Over time, program participants report that they have developed a positive perception of how Parent Aware is helping them improve their quality.
- Fully-rated programs are more likely than automatically-rated programs to agree that their program is of higher quality after joining Parent Aware and that Parent Aware has been beneficial to their program.
- Suggestions from program participants for improving Parent Aware center around the observational component of the rating process. Comments focused on their perception that the observation is not objective and the tools may not be appropriately tailored to programs of different types (for example, Montessori programs and family child care programs).
- To date, program participants indicate that they agree somewhat (but not strongly) that Parent Aware has made an impact on their marketing and relationships with families.

Figure 3. Overall impression of Parent Aware reported by participants



Source: 2011 Parent Aware Evaluation Survey. Responses from 36 fully-rated child care center directors, 39 fully-rated family child care providers, and 42 directors and providers of automatically-rated programs, Head Start programs, and School Readiness programs.

Recommendations

- Build on the positive impressions of programs in Parent Aware by developing new marketing materials that share these impressions with potential enrollees. Consider developing peer-to-peer mentoring so that programs can contact another program when they have questions or concerns (in addition to contacting Parent Aware staff).
- Address programs' concerns about the observational component of the rating process. Consult with other state QRIS about strategies used to facilitate the observational process so that it is constructive and supportive for programs.
- Continue developing strategies to help programs engage and inform families about their participation in Parent Aware. Outreach materials can be developed for families already enrolled as well as prospective families who are visiting the program or looking online for information.
- Collect data from programs that chose not to pursue a second rating in Parent Aware to learn more about the reasons for exiting the program. Use the data to inform strategies for improved retention.

Quality Improvement and Re-Ratings

One of the goals of Parent Aware is to support programs in improving the quality of care and education that they provide to young children. Participating programs in Parent Aware receive multiple supports and resources in order to make improvements. First, all programs receive assistance in navigating the Parent Aware rating process, and programs that have not yet earned four stars receive additional assistance to move toward a four-star rating. Second, programs have access to consultation and coaching focused on improving the quality of the environment and on improving the quality of interactions with children. Parent Aware assesses the quality of the environment and interactions by conducting observations directly in the early care and education setting. Two tools are used. The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) are a family of measures designed to assess global quality. Specific measures are designed for infant and toddler classrooms (Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale; ITERS-R) and preschool classrooms (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale; ECERS-R) in center-based settings and for family child care programs (Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale; FCCERS-R). The Classroom Observation Scoring System (CLASS) is used in preschool classrooms to assess the quality of teacher-child interactions. ERS Consultants and CLASS Coaches are provided to Parent Aware programs to provide information about the aspects of quality that are assessed in the tools and to provide concrete strategies and assistance for improving scores on the observational measures. Lastly, in addition to supports provided to navigate the rating process and on the practices that are observed using the ERS and CLASS, programs also have access to financial supports to purchase needed materials and resources.

In the final year of the pilot, quality improvement supports received in-depth attention in the Parent Aware Evaluation. The focus was on understanding:

- What supports are programs receiving to make quality improvements?
- What efforts are programs making on their own to improve quality?
- Are programs improving their Parent Aware rating over time?
- Are programs improving over time on observed measures of quality?
- Do providers believe that the quality of their care has improved?

Administrative records, surveys of provider perceptions of supports received and how Parent Aware has affected their program's quality, and scores on the observational measure were used to address the evaluation questions.

Key Findings

What supports are programs receiving to make quality improvements?

- Every fully-rated program receives the support of a Provider Resource Specialist (PRS) for 8.2 hours of direct contact on average (including time spent on-site or on the phone with providers), with a range from 3 to 30 hours of support per rating. According to PRS report, family child care providers receive more hours of support than center-based programs, and providers who are English Language Learners (ELL) receive more hours of support than non-ELL providers.
- The most common activity that family child care providers and center-based programs work on with their PRS is assembly of the Parent Aware documentation packet. Other interactions with a PRS vary by program type. For family child care providers, the second most common activity is preparing for the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) observation visit, followed by putting in place a curriculum and picking out new materials. For center-based programs, the second most common activity is picking out new materials, followed by preparing for the ERS observation and enrolling in the Professional Development Registry. The Registry is a database that is used to track practitioners' training, education and employment in the early care and education field. Participation in the Registry is required for programs to earn points in the Teacher Training and Education category of Parent Aware.
- Most, but not all, programs receive the support of an ERS consultant (13.75 hours on average per rating), though the dosage of supports varies. Family child care providers receive more hours of support, on average, than center-based programs. Both family child care providers and directors report that their time with their ERS consultant was spent understanding the ERS scoring system, rearranging the program's physical space, purchasing new learning materials, and improving hand-washing and other sanitary procedures.
- CLASS coaching has been available since mid-2010 and is available to center-based programs serving preschoolers (because CLASS is not used in other settings). Across the 13 programs about which data were available, programs received 23.2 hours on average of CLASS coaching. When asked what their CLASS coach does during visits, program directors report that the CLASS coach most often observes teachers and gives feedback. Many directors also said that the CLASS coach frequently helps them organize classroom processes to aid children's learning and helps staff understand the CLASS scales and scoring system.
- All programs with less than four stars are eligible to use Parent Aware quality improvement supports for purchases that will improve their quality. The amount available is predetermined for each cohort of programs in the rating process. Nearly all eligible programs take advantage of this resource, spending on average \$2,791 on materials or resources to improve quality. The majority of the money is spent on materials for the

learning environment (as opposed to teacher resource materials, equipment, assessment materials, or training/consultation).

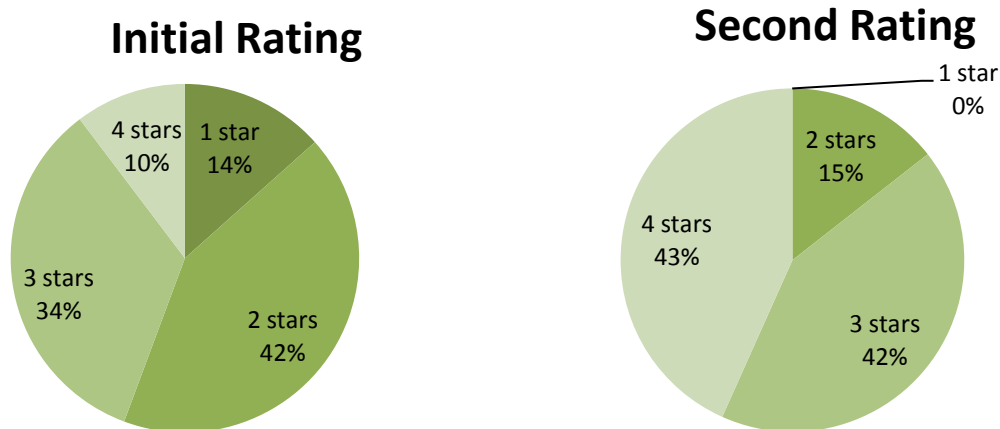
What efforts are programs making on their own to improve quality?

- Providers were asked to report on the three areas in which they or their program spent the most money to make quality improvements over the past 12 months, not including any materials, items, or trainings purchased or provided by Parent Aware. The most commonly reported area of expenditure was purchasing materials for the classroom, followed by professional development for staff (including training and education).
- Family child care providers reported spending on average \$5,000 on quality improvement in the last year, while center directors reported spending on average \$30,000 on quality improvement in the last year.

Are programs improving their Parent Aware rating over time?

- The majority of programs that received a second rating improved their rating by at least a full star level, with family child care providers making greater improvements than center-based programs (see Figure 4).
- Increased star ratings are primarily attributable to improvements made in the Tracking Learning category. This includes implementing child assessments, sharing the results of those assessments with parents, and using the results to guide instruction.

Figure 4. Star level at initial rating and at second rating among 97 programs that have received at least two ratings



Source: Parent Aware Rating Tool database, as of September 7, 2011

Are programs improving over time on observed measures of quality?

- Overall, programs make small but significant improvements on the ERS (one-third to one-half a point higher on a seven-point scale) between their first rating and second rating. However, 41% of programs are scoring lower on ECERS-R (the measure used to assess global quality in center-based preschool rooms) and 19% are scoring lower on the ITERS-R (the measure used to assess global quality in center-based infant and toddler classrooms) at their second rating. Nearly 30% of family child care programs score lower on the FCCERS-R (the measure used to assess global quality in family child care homes) at their second rating.
- On average, center-based programs make significant improvements on the Emotional Support subscale and Classroom Organization subscale of the CLASS (a measure of teacher-child interactions), though 38% and 24% of providers score lower on these two subscales, respectively, at their second rating. No significant change was seen in scores on the Instructional Support subscale of the CLASS.

Do providers believe that the quality of their care has improved?

- The majority of programs (over 70%) “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” that their program is of higher quality because they joined Parent Aware and a similar percentage “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” that their program has benefited from participating in Parent Aware.
- When asked what makes quality improvement challenging, center directors report that lack of money and time are their biggest obstacles to improving their quality; family child care providers cite the constraints posed by their physical space as their biggest obstacle to better quality.

Recommendations

- Continue to support quality improvement while recognizing that the gains programs are making on Parent Aware ratings are not accompanied by proportionate gains on observational measures of quality. This discrepancy indicates a need to continue evaluating the weighting scheme for observational measures in the rating tool and the role they should play in determining the final rating.
- Develop processes for entering data and tracking services provided by the technical assistance staff on a regular basis. The method used for the Evaluation required staff to review records and submit data after they had worked with providers. It would be more accurate to collect these data in real time so that they could be used for regular tracking and performance management.

Validation of the Parent Aware Rating Tool - Observed Quality

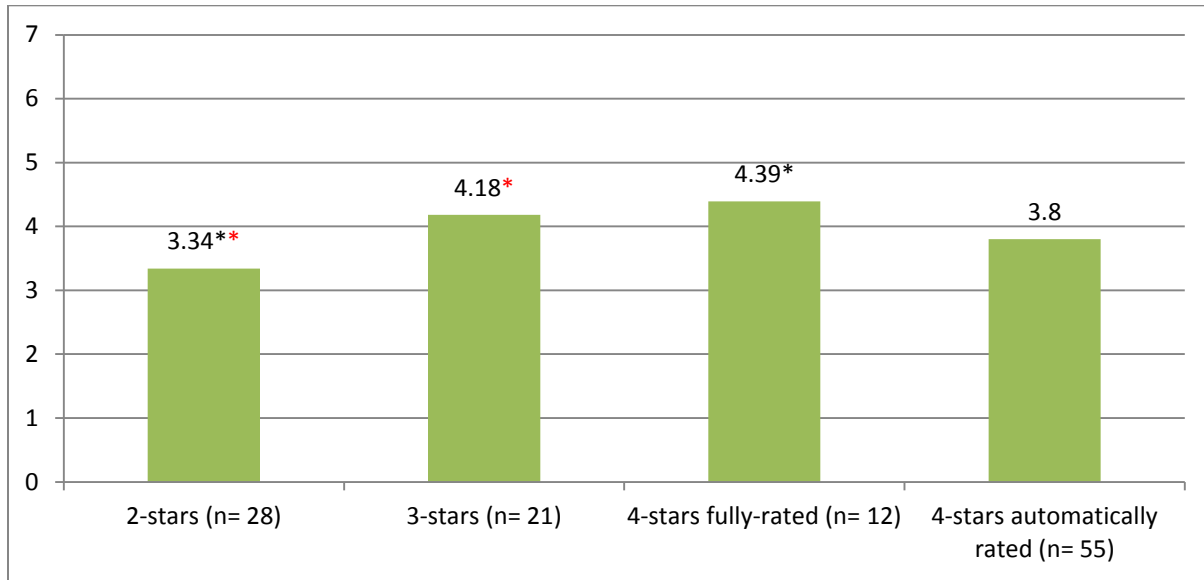
Validation of a Quality Rating and Improvement System is an examination of how well the rating process captures meaningful differences in program quality. For example, is a 4-star program providing care and education that is different from a 1-star program, and are these differences linked to the outcomes that are desired? In the Parent Aware evaluation, two approaches were used to test whether the rating process is linked to desired outcomes. In the first, associations between star rating level and observed measures of the environment and interactions between teachers and children were examined. It was expected that better scores on observational measures would be observed at higher rating levels. The second approach will be addressed in the following section.

For the analyses presented in this section, it is useful to know that the observational measures are scored on a 7-point scale. For the ERS, according to the scale authors, scores in the range of 1- to 2-points are considered “inadequate” quality; scores in the range of 3- to 4-points are considered “minimal” quality; scores of 5- to 6-points are considered “good” quality and a score of 7-points is “excellent” quality. Scores on the CLASS are categorized in three subscales: Emotional Support, Classroom Management, and Instructional Support. Scores of 1-2 are in the low range, scores of 3-5 are in the mid-range, and scores of 6-7 are in the high range on the CLASS.

Key Findings: What is the relation between measures of observed quality and Parent Aware ratings?

If a QRIS is functioning as intended, it would be expected that higher scores on observational measures of quality (including global quality and measures of teacher-child interaction) would be related to higher star ratings. In the first analysis, a measure of global quality in center-based preschool classrooms (the ECERS-R) was compared across programs with different Parent Aware star ratings. An overall statistically significant difference was detected. Specifically, 4-star fully-rated programs and 3-star programs scored higher than 2-star programs on the global quality measure. No other differences were statistically significant (see Figure 5). The findings lend minimal support to the assertion that Parent Aware star ratings are linked to meaningful differences in quality.

Figure 5. Mean global quality score (ECERS-R) in preschool classrooms, by star level

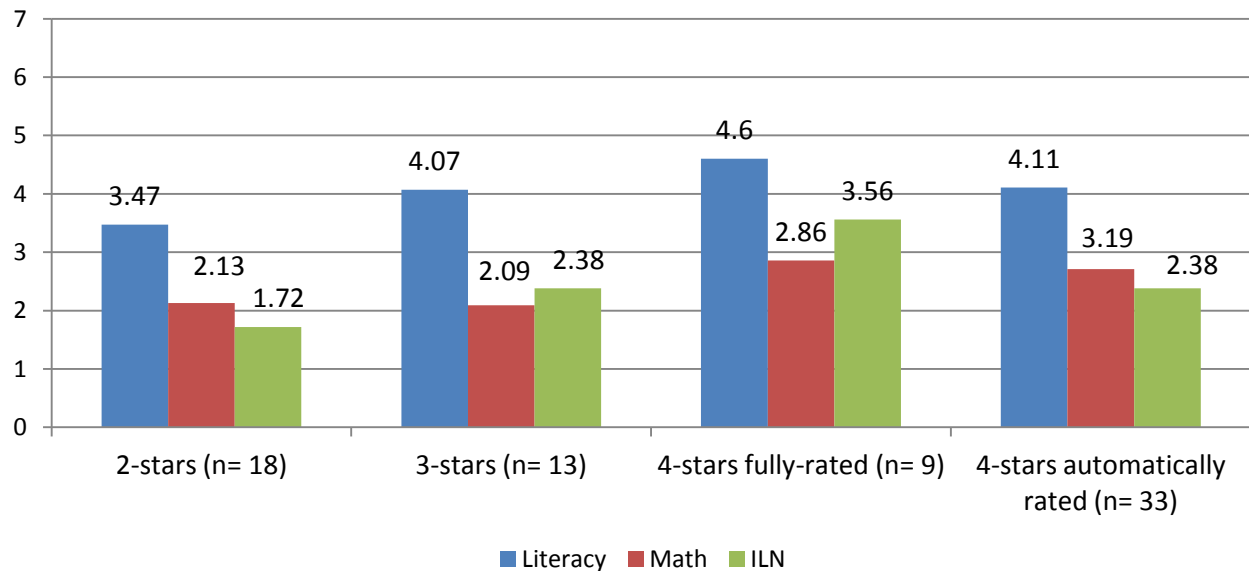


Source: Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), University of Minnesota as of June 30, 2011

Note: Asterisks of the same color indicate statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Additional measures of observed quality (from the ECERS-E) that focused on math and literacy practices, as well as a measure of individual learning needs did not vary significantly by star rating level (see Figure 6).

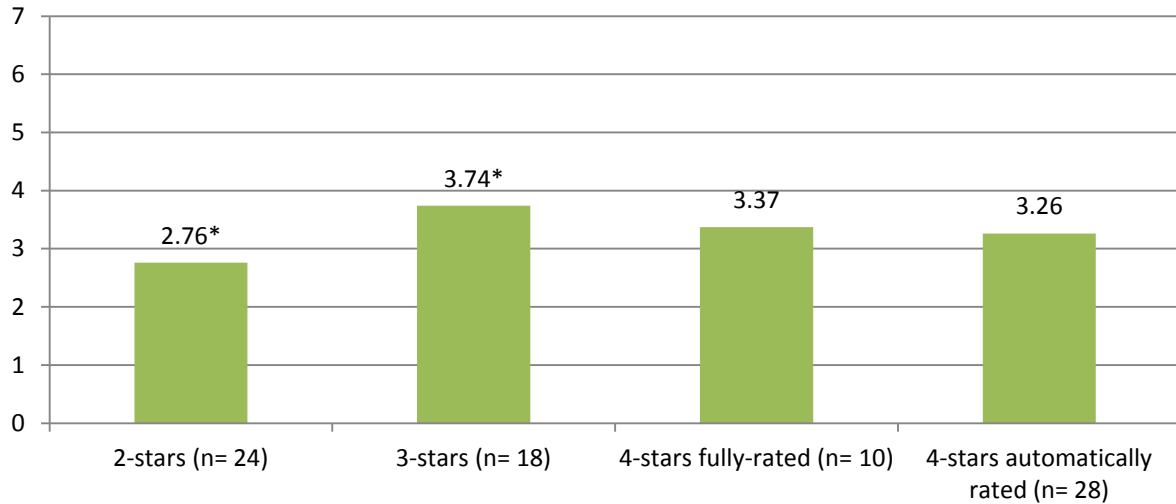
Figure 6. Mean math, literacy, and individual learning needs (ECERS-E) scores by star rating



Source: Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), University of Minnesota as June, 2011

A measure of global quality used in infant/toddler rooms in center-based programs (ITERS-R) was moderately related to star rating level, with 3-star programs scoring significantly higher than 2-star programs (see Figure 7). However, no other differences across star levels were significant.

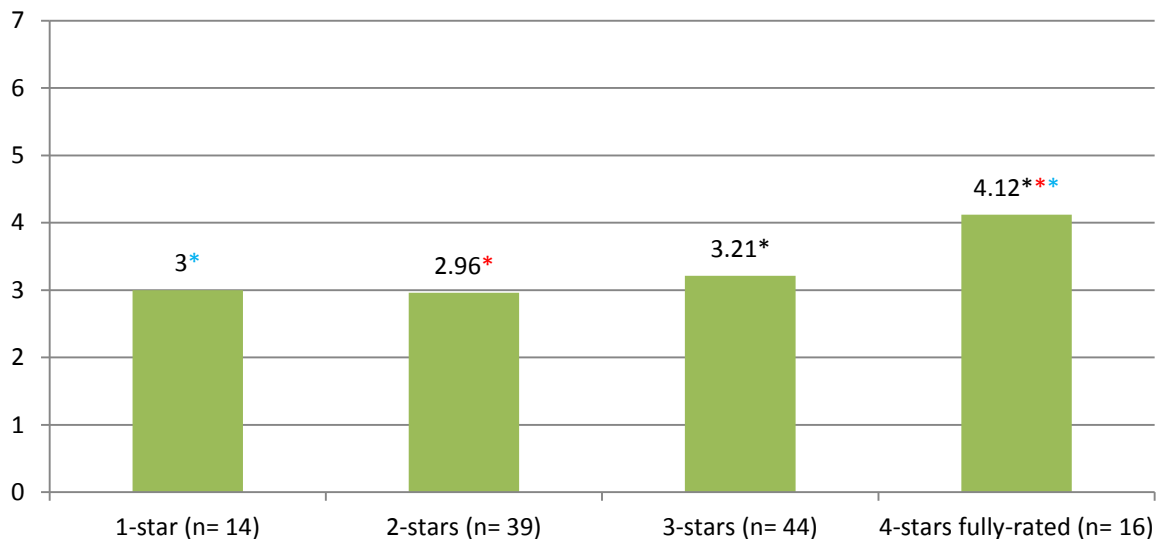
Figure 7. Mean global quality score (ITERS-R) in infant/toddler classrooms by star rating



Source: Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), University of Minnesota as of June 30, 2011.
 Note: Asterisks indicate significant differences between the groups.

The relation between global quality scores in family child care homes (FCCERS-R) and star rating level provided somewhat stronger evidence that a 4-star rating distinguishes a level of quality that is higher than 1-, 2-, or 3-star ratings (see Figure 8).

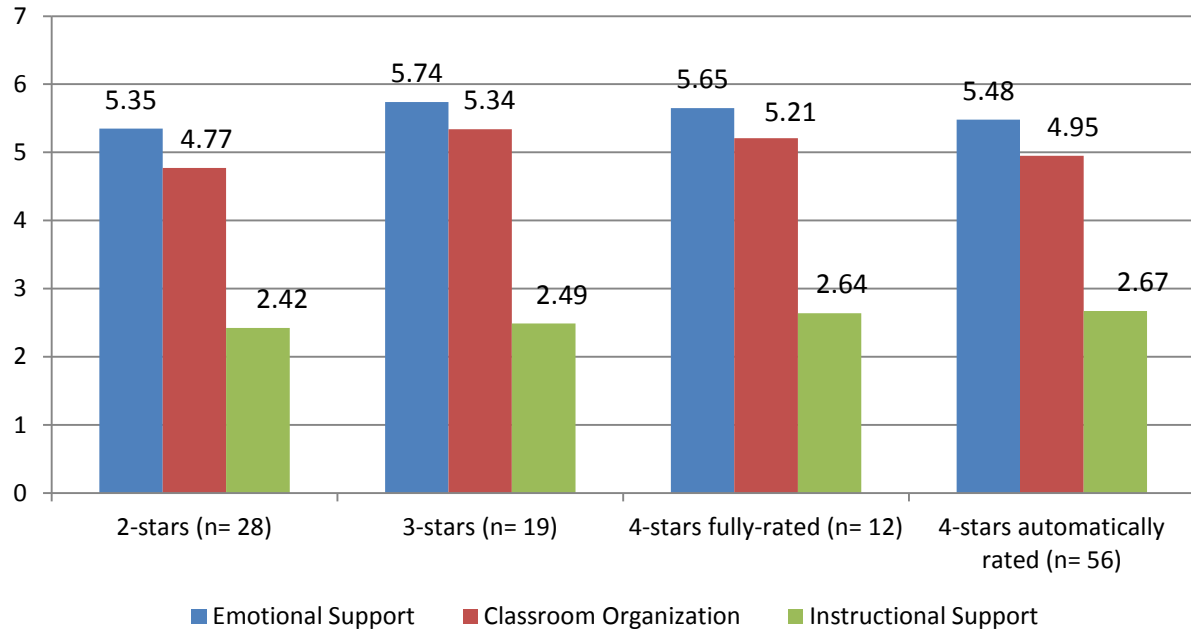
Figure 8. Mean global quality score (FCCERS-R) in family child care homes by star rating



Source: Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), University of Minnesota as of June 30, 2011
 Note: Asterisks of the same color indicate significant differences between the groups.

Finally, a measure that focuses on dimensions of teacher/child interaction (the CLASS) including provision of Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support was not related to star rating level (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Mean quality of teacher/child interaction scores (CLASS) by star level



Source: Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), University of Minnesota as of June 30, 2011

Overall:

- Average observed quality scores were largely in the “minimal quality” range (scores between 3 and 5) on measures of global quality (the Environment Rating Scales). Average scores on the measures of teacher-child interaction were in the “mid” range (scores between 3 and 5 on the CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization) or “low” range (1-2 on the CLASS Instructional Support). These lower scores were noted even among programs with higher Parent Aware ratings, indicating a need to focus on quality improvement across the rating spectrum.
- There was limited evidence of observed quality scores increasing in predicted ways across 2-, 3-, and 4-star fully-rated programs. Four-star programs scored significantly higher than some (but not all) star levels on measures of observed global quality in preschool classrooms and family child care programs. Predicted differences across star levels were not supported by the data for observed global quality in infant-toddler classrooms, observed math and literacy practices, or observed measures of teacher-child interaction quality in preschool classrooms.

Recommendations

- Address the minimal quality levels observed in Parent Aware programs by supporting quality improvement strategies aimed at critical practices such as support for instructional practices and enhanced global quality.
- Continue to track observed quality scores and how they relate to the rating levels designated by the revised Parent Aware rating tool to be used in the next phase of statewide expansion.

Validation of the Parent Aware Rating Tool - Children's Developmental Gains

The second approach to validation used in the Parent Aware Evaluation is to examine the associations between measures of program quality (observational measures of the environment and teacher/child interactions, Parent Aware quality category scores, and rating levels) and child outcomes. It was expected that greater gains in child development would be associated with higher rating levels and scores on observational measures.

Children in Parent Aware rated programs and their parents were recruited into the evaluation in three cohorts: Fall 2008, fall 2009, and fall 2010. Parent Aware rated programs assisted with the recruitment of eligible children (the majority were children completing the year prior to starting Kindergarten), with priority given to low-income children. Across the three cohorts, 701 children attending 138 Parent Aware-rated programs (including fully-rated and automatically-rated programs) participated in the Evaluation.

The child sample was diverse in race/culture, language and income. Forty-two percent were white, 24% were African American, 8% were Hispanic/Latino and less than 5% were Hmong (4%), other Asian (4%), Alaska Native or American Indian (2%), and African (1%). Eighty percent of the sample spoke English as their primary language. Other languages included Hmong, Spanish, Somali, and Karen. Sixty-one percent had a household income of less than \$50,000 per year, and over one-third (37%) reported receiving some type of scholarship, subsidy, or other assistance for their early care and education expenses.

Children were assessed with measures of language, early literacy skills, and early math and numeracy skills. Measures of social/emotional development were completed by the children's teachers. Child assessments were collected in the fall and spring to assess children's gains across the school year.

Key Findings: What is the linkage between measures of quality used in Parent Aware and children’s developmental gains?

Overall, children made significant positive gains across time on the following skills:

- Expressive language
- Receptive language
- Pre-literacy skills
- Pre-math concepts
- Social competence
- Approaches to learning

Children also demonstrated increases on a measure of anger/aggression (a finding in the unexpected direction). Patterns of significance for the gains were similar for children from low-income families, but the magnitude of the effects was larger, suggesting that children from low-income families are making greater gains across time than children from higher-income families. See Table 2.

Table 2. Average fall to spring gains on developmental measures

Full Sample	N	Average fall to spring gain	Standard deviation	Effect size (Cohen's d)
Expressive vocabulary (IGDI Picture Naming)	555	2.19*	6.47	0.34
Receptive Vocabulary (PPVT-IV)^S	567	2.81*	9.14	0.31
Pre-literacy (TOPEL Phonological Awareness)^S	454	3.25*	11.16	0.29
Pre-literacy (TOPEL Print Knowledge)^S	533	2.49*	9.53	0.26
Pre-math (WJ-III Applied Problems)^S	523	0.15	8.54	0.02
Pre-math (WJ-III Quantitative Concepts)^S	517	1.09*	9.36	0.12
Social competence (SCBE-30 SC)	385	1.89*	7.4	0.26
Anxiety-Withdrawal (SCBE-30 AW)	429	-0.39	5.17	-0.08
Anger-Aggression (SCBE-30 AA)	451	0.62*	6.15	0.10
Approaches to learning (PLBS Persistence)	472	0.36*	2.21	0.16

*Statistically significant changes from fall to spring; ^S indicates standardized score. Effect size is calculated by dividing the gain score by the standard deviation. An effect size less than .3 is typically considered “small”, between .3 and .8 “medium”, and .8 or higher “large”.

Several approaches were used to understand the linkages between characteristics of early care and education programs and child outcomes. Analyses examined the relations between Parent Aware quality category scores, observational measures, and Parent Aware star rating with gains in child outcomes. If Parent Aware ratings and observational measures successfully distinguish levels of quality that are linked to child outcomes, it is expected that children in programs with higher rating levels and scores on observational measures would make greater developmental gains.

Results of the validation analyses examining predictors of developmental gains through multiple analytic models and across subsets of the sample (including separate models for low-income children) are summarized in Table 3. Measures of program quality are listed in the left column and child outcomes are listed across the top of the table. A dark green square where a program characteristic and child outcome meet indicates a statistically significant association in the expected direction. For example, as expected, star level was related to receptive vocabulary such that as star level increased, so did scores on receptive vocabulary. A light green square indicates an association that was unexpected. For example, as scores in Teacher Training and Education increased, scores in expressive vocabulary decreased. Squares that contain an “L” signify that one of the models that included low-income children was statistically significant. In general, it was expected that measures of high quality practices (regardless of the specific content of those practices) would show *positive* associations with children’s developmental outcomes.

Looking at categories of child outcomes, the most consistent pattern is seen in early math skills. Associations between program quality characteristics and gains in early math skills were largely in the expected direction. Results were more inconsistent for language/literacy, social/emotional outcomes, and approaches to learning. Looking across all associations, there were nearly as many unexpected associations as expected associations between program characteristics and child outcomes.

Table 3. Patterns of linkages between quality and measures of children’s fall to spring gains identified across multiple analytic models, by quality measure and child developmental domain

	Language and Literacy skills				Early Math Skills		Social-Emotional Development			Approaches to Learning
	Expressive Vocabulary	Receptive Vocabulary	Print Knowledge	Phonological Awareness	Problem Solving	Math Facts	Social Competence	Anger-Aggression	Anxiety-Withdrawal	Attention/Persistence
Star Level		L						L		L
Parent Aware Quality Categories										
Family Partnerships										
Teaching Materials and Strategies										
Tracking Learning							L			
Teacher Training and Education	L					L				
Observational Measures										
Global quality – preschool	L								L	
Global quality – family child care	L			L	L	L		L		
Literacy practices										
Math practices				L	L	L				
Planning for individual needs			L	L		L	L	L		
Emotional Support Preschool only										
Classroom Organization – Preschool only					L		L		L	
Instructional Support - Preschool only			L	L			L	L	L	
Total Outcomes Across Domains	11 expected outcomes, 7 unexpected outcomes				8 expected outcomes 2 unexpected		5 expected outcomes 9 unexpected outcomes			3 unexpected outcomes

Each quality measure in the left column was modeled as a predictor of each child outcome for (1) all children, (2) all children in fully-rated programs, (3) low-income children and (4) low-income children in fully-rated programs. Light green shading equals a negative/unexpected outcome in *any* of the models; dark green shading equals a positive/expected outcome in *any* of the models. “L” indicates that the pattern was noted in at least one of the models that included low-income children.

Overall:

- Looking across the developmental measures on which children were assessed, significant positive gains were made from fall to spring on measures assessing receptive and expressive language, pre-literacy skills, pre-math concepts, and social competence and approaches to learning. Increased behavior problems were also noted across children. The magnitude of positive gains was larger for children from low-income families.
- It is difficult to draw conclusions about linkages between program characteristics and child outcomes in the sample of children attending Parent Aware rated programs. Children in programs at different quality rating levels or with different scores on observational measures or Parent Aware quality categories did not differ systematically from each other in their developmental gains from fall to spring.

Recommendations

- Continue to weigh options for strengthening the measurement of quality in Parent Aware, either through the inclusion of alternative quality measures or through procedures that tighten the conditions under which quality scores are obtained (for example, clarifying the classroom activities that can be used for scoring the CLASS and strengthening reliability standards).
- Use the findings from the analysis of children's developmental gains to inform professional development for teaching staff and family child care providers. For example, findings indicate that children are not making strong gains on some pre-math skills in the year before Kindergarten. Similarly, children are rated by their teachers and family child care providers as having increased issues with oppositional behavior and frustration tolerance across the school year. These findings represent important opportunities to provide support for teachers and family child care providers working with young children on these critical school readiness skills.

Families Perception of Quality and Recognition of Parent Aware

Provision of information to families to support their early care and education decisions is a central goal of Parent Aware. To assess progress toward that goal, the Evaluation included interviews of parents with children in Parent Aware-rated programs to assess their perceptions of quality and their recognition of Parent Aware.

Parents of children enrolled in the evaluation were interviewed over the phone in the fall of 2008 (n = 153), the fall of 2009 (n = 186), and the fall of 2010 (n = 245). Wilder Research conducted the interviews which included items regarding parents' child care selection, usage, and

satisfaction, their thoughts on quality, perceptions of Parent Aware, and other child care related questions, in addition to family demographic information. Of the 701 children in the evaluation, 552 had corresponding parent interviews.

Key Findings

- Mothers were 33.2 years of age on average, fathers were 35.6 years old. Twelve percent of parents reported that they were from an immigrant or refugee group. One-fifth of mothers had a high-school education or less, and nearly half (47%) had at least a Bachelors degree. For fathers, 32% had a high-school education or less and 38% had a Bachelors degree or higher.
- Just over half (53%) of the parents were married and living with their spouse. The majority of parents (74%) worked at least 36 hours per week. Just under 30% of parents reported receiving free or reduced school lunches for their children, 28% received WIC, and 25% used subsidies from the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).
- Looking across all of the types of early care and education arrangements used at least once in the past two weeks, 80% used center-based care for their children, 23% used family child care, 14% were in Head Start, 46% used relative care, and 10% used non-relative care.
- Parents most often learned about their child’s early care and education program through word of mouth. They most often chose the program because they thought it was high quality (28%) or because it was close to home (15%). Less than 1% reported choosing their program based on the Parent Aware rating.
- Over one-third (34%) of parents had heard of Parent Aware in fall 2010. This was an increase from 20% in the fall of 2008, and 25% in the fall of 2009. Parents are highly satisfied with their early care and education programs. Satisfaction does not vary by Parent Aware star rating.

Recommendations

- Continue to prioritize marketing and outreach efforts that intentionally target families with young children and are designed to support their decision-making.
- Continue to prioritize data collection from children with diverse characteristics. If feasible, include systematic data collection from children as part of the program requirements for enrolling in Parent Aware to ensure a more representative sample of children in the Evaluation.

Methods and Challenges Related to Understanding Child Outcomes in Parent Aware

Over the four years of the pilot, questions have been raised about the strategy for studying children in the Parent Aware Evaluation. This section addresses two questions that have been raised by stakeholders about why there is no control group of children in the Evaluation and how children's developmental outcomes can be compared.

First, the Parent Aware Evaluation is not an experimental study with a control group and an intervention group. A *control group* is used in an experimental study and refers to a group of participants who agree to participate in an intervention or treatment, but who, after being *randomly* assigned to a condition, do not end up receiving the “treatment” or intervention that is being studied. The control group is sometimes called the “no treatment” condition. A design with a control group allows causal inferences to be made about the program or intervention examined. In the Parent Aware pilot, it was not possible to use an experimental design because full implementation of the QRIS required that all programs in the pilot area have the option to enroll.

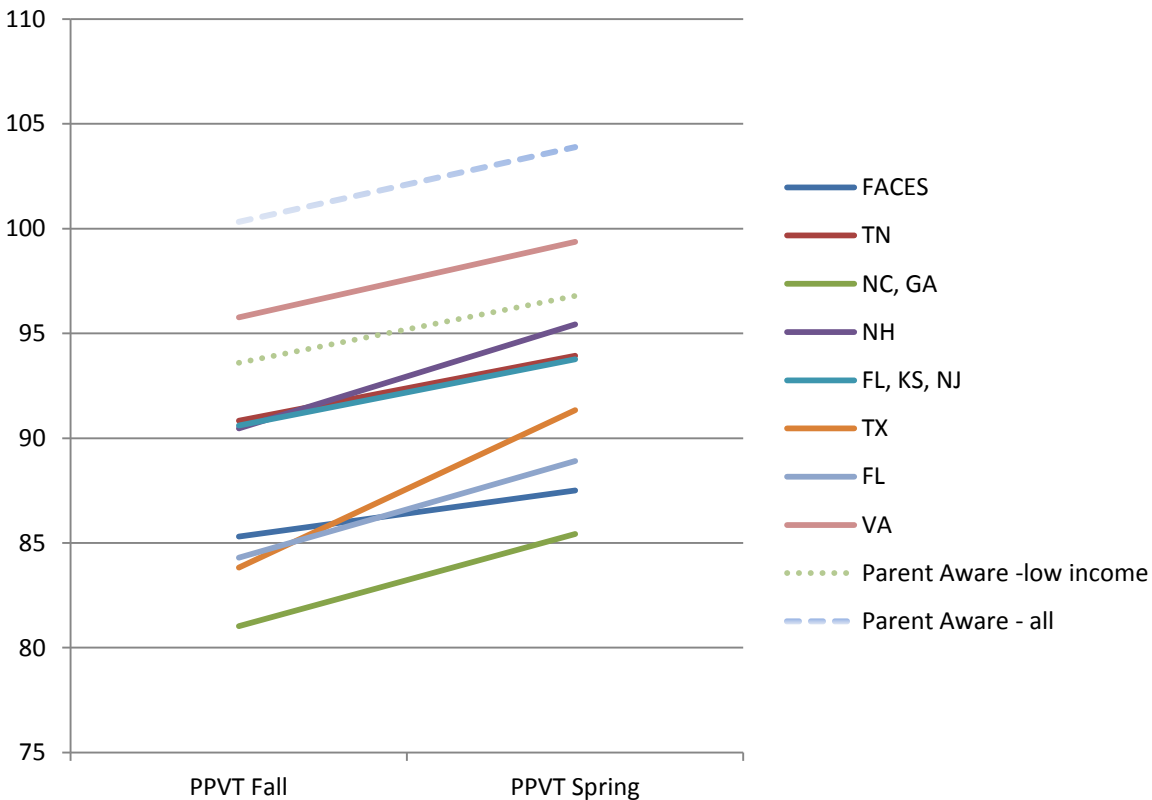
Though the Evaluation does not include control and intervention groups of children (or programs), planned comparisons are built into the Evaluation design in three ways. First, children *in programs at different rating levels in the QRIS* are compared to each other. For example, the development of children in programs with the highest rating (three stars or four stars) is compared to children in programs at lower star levels (one star or two stars). In the Year 3 Evaluation Report, these comparisons were not possible due to small sample sizes of programs and children in programs at lower star levels. The comparisons are possible in this Final Report (as described above), though sample size is still a limiting factor. Currently, there is minimal evidence that children participating in programs with different rating levels exhibit different outcomes (with demographic characteristics controlled).

A second comparison can be conducted with a subset of the developmental measures that are included in the Evaluation. The measures of Receptive Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness, Print Knowledge, Applied Problems and Quantitative Concepts are *standardized* which allows comparisons to be made between children in the Parent Aware sample and a nationally normed sample (that takes into account children's age and gender). On a standardized assessment, the mean (average) is 100 and the standard deviation (a measure of variation in the sample) is 15. The Parent Aware sample over-selected children from low-income families, so lower scores on the measures might be expected. Yet, overall, the Parent Aware sample is close to the national averages on most standardized measures. For example, looking at the measure of Receptive Vocabulary (the PPVT-IV), the full sample means are close to the national averages on the child assessments (100.32 in the Fall and 103.89 in the Spring). When broken down by income, however, the low-income group starts with lower scores than the high-income group. For

example, the low-income group scores 93.6 in the Fall and 96.78 in the Spring on the PPVT while the high-income group scores about a standard deviation above the national average (114.01 in the Fall and 116.63 in the Spring).

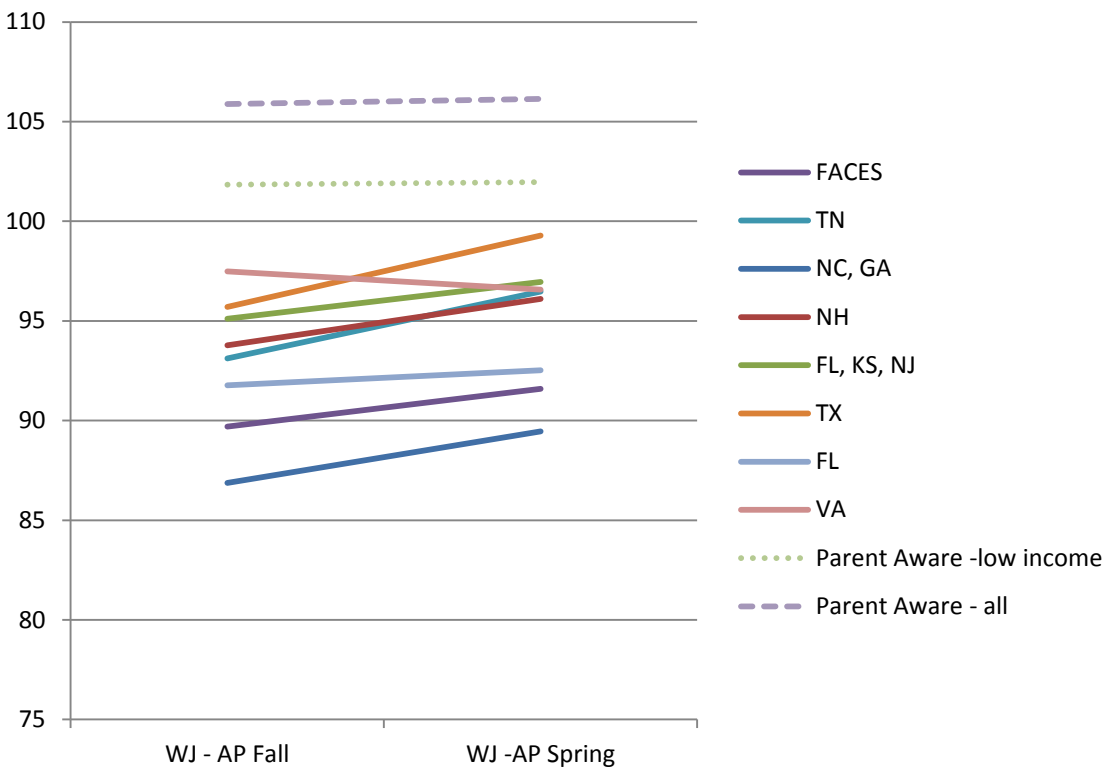
A third comparison can be made by plotting children’s developmental gains on standardized assessments with data from studies of preschool children conducted in other states and contexts. This analysis allows some assessment of how children in Parent Aware are doing relative to similar populations of children in other states. Figure 10 compares Receptive Vocabulary (PPVT-IV) and Figure 11 compares pre-math (Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems) data from preschoolers participating in the Head Start Family and Child Experiences study (FACES) and from a variety of studies that were part of the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research project (PCER; note that some studies combined data from multiple sites in different states). The purpose of these figures is to provide a reference point for the Parent Aware child assessment data. Compared to children in these various samples, children in the Parent Aware sample are performing above their peers. However, while gains are evident for receptive vocabulary, the fall to spring changes on applied problems (a measure of pre-math skills) are flat.

Figure 10. Gains on receptive vocabulary (PPVT) from fall to spring across multiple samples and studies



Source: Child Trends’ summary of publicly available data

Figure 11. Gains on applied problems (Woodcock Johnson) from fall to spring across multiple samples and studies



Source: Child Trends' summary of publicly available data

Summary and Next Steps

The Year 4 Evaluation Report provides an update on the status of Parent Aware implementation in the final year of the pilot. The report describes contextual factors, Parent Aware participation rates, ratings issued, and characteristics of programs in Parent Aware. The report pays special attention to the outcomes of the re-rating process for programs and the quality improvement supports that are provided. Finally, the report includes an examination of parents of children in Parent Aware-rated programs and their knowledge and perceptions of child care and their child care choices. In addition, the report addresses the issue of validation by examining how well the Parent Aware quality levels are distinguishing measures of observed quality as well as children's developmental gains across a range of developmental measures.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

Participation in Parent Aware increased steadily across the years of the pilot.

As of June, 2011, 388 programs had *current* Parent Aware ratings. Family child care is the fastest growing program type in Parent Aware. At the end of the pilot, 91 family child care programs had full ratings compared to 53 child care centers.

Nearly 30% of eligible programs in the pilot areas enrolled in Parent Aware.

Overall, about 28% of eligible center-based, family child care, and Head Start programs in the pilot areas were participating in Parent Aware as of June, 2011. This penetration rate is in the mid-range of other voluntary QRIS nationally. The density of participation is greater in the urban and suburban pilot areas and is greater among center-based programs.

Nearly 24,000 children are being served by Parent Aware programs.

The majority of these children are preschoolers served primarily in school-based, Head-Start, and accredited center-based programs. Over one-third of these children are estimated to receive CCAP and 16% are estimated to be English Language learners.

The majority of programs in Parent Aware have earned the highest rating.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Parent Aware-rated programs are automatically-rated 4-star programs. Of the programs that have a full Parent Aware rating as of June, 2011, 82% received 3- or 4-stars, 15% received 2-stars, and 3% received a 1-star rating.

Programs improve their star level when they receive an annual re-rating.

Sixty percent of centers and 70% of family child care providers improved their rating by at least one star from their initial rating to their second rating. Family child care providers are more likely than center-based providers to improve their star level. Programs that gain one or more star levels tend to earn higher numbers of points in the Tracking Learning category.

When they are re-rated, programs make small but significant gains on measures of observed quality. These gains are about 1/3rd of a point on ratings of global quality (ERS) and classroom organization and ½ of a point on emotional support. Programs do not make significant gains, however, on observed measures of instructional support.

Fully-rated programs receive multiple quality improvement supports through Parent Aware.

Provider Resource Specialists facilitate the rating process for all programs pursuing a full rating. They average 8.2 hours of direct contact (including time spent on-site and phone calls) over 3.6

visits. Providers and their Resource Specialist report spending the most time together assembling the materials for the Parent Aware documentation packet.

ERS Consultants provide consultation to help programs prepare for (and improve) their score on the Environment Rating Scales. They average 13.75 hours of direct contact over 6.4 visits. Seventy-seven programs have received this support to date.

CLASS Coaches provide consultation to help center-based programs prepare for (and improve) their score on the CLASS. They average 23.2 hours of direct contact over 8.8 visits. Fewer programs (13) have received this support to date.

Providers report high satisfaction with Parent Aware quality improvement supports.

The majority of providers report that their Provider Resource Specialist and ERS Consultant are very or somewhat helpful. Providers also report that the provision of free training, quality improvement support dollars, and free curriculum materials were beneficial to their program.

Providers report that Parent Aware has helped them improve the quality of their program.

Providers report that Parent Aware has been beneficial to their program and that the rating they received accurately reflects the quality of their program.

Providers do not perceive that families are choosing their program because of Parent Aware.

Providers are likely to talk to families in their program about Parent Aware. However, most providers disagree or are neutral about the likelihood of families choosing their program because the provider has enrolled in Parent Aware.

Parent recognition of “Parent Aware” has increased over the pilot.

Thirty-four percent of parents with children in Parent Aware-rated programs had heard of Parent Aware in the fall of 2010. This is an increase from 25% in 2009 and 20% in 2008.

A measure of parent satisfaction with their early care and education program did not distinguish between programs of different star levels.

Parents value multiple dimensions of early care and education settings and report that they see these dimensions in the program they are using for their preschool child. Research is needed to identify measures that better tap into parents’ perceptions of quality and satisfaction with their early care and education arrangement so that they can be used in future QRIS evaluations.

Measures of observed quality in Parent Aware programs indicate that quality improvements are needed, particularly on dimensions of global quality and instructional support.

The majority of ERS scores were in the “minimal” quality range, and some were in the “inadequate” quality range. CLASS scores were in the middle range for Emotional Support and Classroom Organization but in the low range for Instructional support.

There is limited evidence to suggest that the Parent Aware Rating Tool is distinguishing levels of observed quality effectively.

Across observational measures, there was little evidence for a linear trend showing increasing quality across 2-star, 3-star, and 4-star fully-rated programs. This finding indicates that further work is needed to strengthen the indicators and the construction of quality levels in Parent Aware. This work has been initiated already through Minnesota’s Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge application process.

Across Parent Aware-rated programs, children make significant developmental gains from the fall to spring on assessments aligned with key indicators of school readiness.

Children make gains on measures of expressive and receptive vocabulary, early literacy skills, math skills, social competence and persistence. There is reason for concern however, about a teacher-reported *increase* from fall to spring on a measure of children’s angry-aggressive behavior. Low-income children show the same pattern as the overall sample, and the effect sizes for measures of language and literacy gains are in the medium range. This finding does not imply that Parent Aware is the cause of positive or negative changes in children’s outcomes. It does imply, however, that among the programs participating in Parent Aware – which includes primarily programs with automatic 4-star ratings – children are making mostly positive gains in the developmental domains that are important for school readiness.

No clear linkages could be detected between children’s developmental gains and Parent Aware quality levels or other aspects of program quality.

Looking across the results of multiple analytic models, it is difficult to detect a clear pattern of linkages between various measures of quality and children’s developmental outcomes. An analysis mapping the findings by developmental domain provides an emerging picture of quality measures being slightly more predictive in expected ways of children’s early math outcomes and to a lesser extent, language and literacy outcomes, when linkages were found. Linkages between quality measures and social-emotional outcomes and approaches to learning, when found, were consistently in an unexpected direction.

Next Steps and Recommendations

A number of successes were clear in the pilot that can be built on to support the next phase of statewide expansion of Parent Aware.

- Program enrollment grew throughout the pilot, even in the final year when the future of Parent Aware was unclear.
- The provision of quality improvement supports was aligned with the quality indicators and was linked with significant program improvements on the rating scale at the second rating.
- Overall supports for providers (including technical assistance for quality improvement) are perceived positively by providers, and providers report increasing their focus on quality as a result of their participation in Parent Aware.
- Parent recognition of the Parent Aware program (among parents with children in Parent Aware-rated programs) increased each year of the pilot.
- Children in Parent Aware-rated programs make positive gains in the developmental domains that are important for school-readiness.

Recommendations for applying these and other key findings of the Evaluation are included within each section of this report and summarized below.

- Continue using systematic strategies for tracking and recording details about the context of Parent Aware and the related quality improvement efforts that emerge in either a parallel or coordinated way to support Parent Aware. These details will be important for documenting the impact of Parent Aware over time.
- The distribution of programs in Parent Aware is heavily weighted toward the upper end of the rating scale. Consider strategies to recruit programs at lower quality levels to increase the diversity of programs included in Parent Aware.
- The density of program participation (calculated as the percentage of eligible programs that have enrolled in Parent Aware) is in the middle range of participation rates seen nationwide in voluntary QRIS. Develop incentives and supports to encourage greater participation across center-based programs and family child care programs.
- Continue to diversify the programs that are enrolled in Parent Aware. Targeted support strategies such as those that were evaluated in the Getting Ready program and that were aimed at recruiting family child care providers and programs serving children who are English Language Learners can be successful in facilitating recruitment of programs serving a higher percentage of children with particular risk factors.

- Automate the process for gathering data on the characteristics of children served in Parent Aware-rated programs. These statistics are included in performance measures proposed for Race to the Top and in new reporting requirements for the federal Child Care and Development Fund program and will need to be tracked on a regular basis.
- Build on the positive impressions of programs in Parent Aware by developing new marketing materials that share these impressions with potential enrollees. Consider developing peer-to-peer mentoring so that programs can contact another program when they have questions or concerns (in addition to contacting Parent Aware staff).
- Address programs' concerns about the observational component of the rating process. Consult with other state QRIS about strategies used to facilitate the observational process so that it is constructive and supportive for programs.
- Continue developing strategies to help programs engage and inform families about their participation in Parent Aware. Outreach materials can be developed for families already enrolled as well as prospective families who are visiting the program or looking online for information.
- Collect data from programs that chose not to pursue a second rating in Parent Aware to learn more about the reasons for exiting the program. Use the data to inform strategies for improved retention.
- Continue to support quality improvement while recognizing that the gains programs are making on Parent Aware ratings are not accompanied by proportionate gains on observational measures of quality. This discrepancy indicates a need to continue evaluating the weighting scheme for observational measures in the rating tool and the role they should play in determining the final rating.
- Develop processes for entering data and tracking services provided by the technical assistance staff on a regular basis. The method used for the Evaluation required staff to review records and submit data after they had worked with providers. It would be more accurate to collect these data in real time so that they could be used for regular tracking and performance management.
- Address the minimal quality levels observed in Parent Aware programs by supporting quality improvement strategies aimed at critical practices such as support for instructional practices and enhanced global quality.

- Continue to track observed quality scores and how they relate to the rating levels designated by the revised Parent Aware rating tool to be used in the next phase of statewide expansion.
- Continue to weigh options for strengthening the measurement of quality in Parent Aware, either through the inclusion of alternative quality measures or through procedures that tighten the conditions under which quality scores are obtained (for example, clarifying the classroom activities that can be used for scoring the CLASS and strengthening reliability standards).
- Use the findings from the analysis of children’s developmental gains to inform professional development for teaching staff and family child care providers. For example, findings indicate that children are not making strong gains on some pre-math skills in the year before Kindergarten. Similarly, children are rated by their teachers and family child care providers as having increased issues with oppositional behavior and frustration tolerance across the school year. These findings represent important opportunities to provide support for teachers and family child care providers working with young children on these critical school readiness skills.
- Continue to prioritize marketing and outreach efforts that intentionally target families with young children and are designed to support their decision-making.
- Continue to prioritize data collection from children with diverse characteristics. If feasible, include systematic data collection from children as part of the program requirements for enrolling in Parent Aware to ensure a more representative sample of children in the Evaluation.

**For complete results from the Parent Aware Evaluation Final Report,
see:**

Tout, K., Starr, R., Isner, T., Cleveland, J., Albertson-Junkans, L., Soli, M. & Quinn K. (2011). *Evaluation of Parent Aware: Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot. Final Evaluation Report*. Minneapolis, MN: Child Trends.