

Ideas for Changes to Parent Aware: Group Session Handout

Participant Version

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has requested input on ideas for changes to Parent Aware. This handout provides information for those participating in group sessions to share feedback on the ideas for changes. The sections below include links to documents you'll need, some background information about this effort, and the ideas for changes and questions you'll discuss during your group session.

Links to Materials

Materials	Description
Demographic Survey	At the beginning of your group session, you'll be asked to fill out a brief survey about yourself to help those analyzing the data know how many people participated, and whether the sessions are reaching a diverse group. The survey is anonymous and will not be tied to your name.
Individual Survey	If you cannot attend your group session or want to offer additional feedback after your group session, you can do so using this survey any time before March 31, 2024.
Parent Aware Overview of Proposed Changes and Revised Quality Practices	This document provides a high-level overview of proposed changes to Parent Aware, including to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The framework for defining quality• The Rating process and Star Rating levels• The quality practices (indicators) that child care and early education settings would be supported to implement by Parent Aware
Parent Aware Rating Pathways: Alignment Chart	This document contains a table summarizing the alignment of the Rating and quality improvement processes across different program types.

Background Information

[Parent Aware](#) is Minnesota's quality rating and improvement system for child care and early education programs. Over the past few years, the Department of Human Services (DHS), in collaboration with the Departments of Education and Health, have worked closely with Minnesota child care providers, families and partners to gather feedback on Parent Aware and identify which parts of the system are working well and which could be improved. As part of a set of [Parent Aware Redesign projects](#), the state has developed ideas for changes to Parent Aware that center best practices, address existing inequities, and remove barriers to participation for all program types.

In the session, you'll get to review some of the state's ideas for changes to Parent Aware and share your feedback. These ideas were developed by a work group that included early educators, state government agency staff, and content experts from Minnesota. The ideas for changes are not final. We are asking you and others across the state to share feedback on the ideas because we have an opportunity to refine and strengthen them!

We know that everyone has a unique relationship to and perspective on Parent Aware. If you are a coach, trainer, advocate, parent, or have some other connection to Parent Aware, please feel free to share any personal reflections on what these changes would mean for you and your networks as well as what they would mean for early care and education providers in Minnesota.

Topics for Group Sessions: Ideas for Changes to Parent Aware

There are ten (10) ideas for changes to Parent Aware that you can discuss with your group. The ideas and some questions for the group are provided below for your reference during the session. Each idea explains how Parent Aware is currently, the problem or challenge with the current system, and the idea for how to change it.

You likely will not have time during the group session to discuss all 10 ideas, so we'll ask you to choose 3-4 to discuss with your group. If you run out of time and you are interested in hearing some of the other ideas for changes to Parent Aware and sharing your thoughts, there are other ways to share your feedback! After the session, you will have the option to also complete the [individual survey](#) online where you can add written feedback on the ideas.

Topics for Group Discussion

- **Topic 1:** Emphasizing quality recognition and continuous quality improvement over Ratings
- **Topic 2:** Automatic One-Star Ratings
- **Topic 3:** Aligning Rating requirements and monitoring processes for child care, Pre-K, and Head Start
- **Topic 4:** Supporting programs to provide quality learning environments that are culturally, linguistically, and ability affirming
- **Topic 5:** Supporting early educators to engage in ongoing family communication
- **Topic 6:** Expanding observations and coaching on child-adult interactions in all settings, but without being scored for Ratings
- **Topic 7:** Supporting early educators' and administrators' growth through customized training
- **Topic 8:** Supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being
- **Topic 9:** Practices to promote supportive behavior guidance
- **Topic 10:** Expanding search options on the Parent Aware website to help families learn about what makes programs unique

1. **Topic 1 (Required): Emphasize quality recognition and continuous quality improvement over Ratings**

Current: Parent Aware provides indicators of quality. Child care and early education providers submit evidence they meet the indicators, and this information is used to calculate Ratings. Ratings are displayed on the ParentAware.org website. Child care and early education providers receive support to submit evidence. Child care providers have access to a range of coaching options, with some receiving a small amount of help, and others receiving more.

Problem: Child care programs spend considerable time documenting and uploading the evidence to meet Parent Aware indicators of quality, and this time could be spent working with a coach assessing current practices and improving practices that benefit children, families, and their staff. Additionally, terms like “indicators” and “ratings” are abstract and can make the rating process feel stressful for programs.

Idea: Parent Aware could focus more on recognizing programs’ strengths and emphasize continuous quality improvement over ratings. One way to accomplish this could be to revise some of the language and processes Parent Aware uses. For example, Parent Aware could drop the term “ratings” and instead call them “quality recognition levels.” And, instead of a complex set of “quality indicators” that programs have to submit extensive evidence for, Parent Aware could offer a simplified set of “quality practices” that programs will be supported to work toward. These quality practices could emphasize the experiences children, families, and early educators will have if these practices are used and recognize programs for making progress toward those practices with fewer or more flexible evidence requirements. Similarly, Parent Aware could provide more intensive coaching and other supports to help programs assess their quality, set goals, and work toward them. The questions throughout this guide have additional examples of how changes to Parent Aware could help emphasize quality recognition and improvement over ratings, and more information can also be found here in the [Parent Aware Overview of Proposed Changes and Revised Quality Practices](#) document.

The draft new framework provides the quality practices in three categories: 1) Children, 2) Families, and 3) Early Educators. More information can be found in the overview document linked above. This document is provided to help you get a sense of how the new process would work and what the expectations could be. You can review and share more feedback on this and other proposed changes via an online survey after the session.

Questions:

- a. How do you feel about these ideas for changing Parent Aware language and framing?

	Strongly prefer	Somewhat prefer	No opinion	Somewhat prefer	Strongly prefer	
Old term: “Quality rating levels”					New term: “Quality recognition levels”	
Old term: “Quality indicators”					New term: “Quality practices”	

- b. Please explain your answer. If you have other ideas for how to address the problem, we’d love to hear them!
- c. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- d. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- e. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?

2. Topic 2 (Required): Rolling out automatic One-Star Ratings for all licensed providers

Current: There are indicators licensed child care programs must meet in order to earn a One Star Rating. However, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law that all licensed child care programs will be assigned a One Star Parent Aware Rating, unless they opt out. This change is planned for July 1, 2026.

Problem: More providers are needed to serve children with Early Learning Scholarships, which families may use only in Rated child care and early education programs. In addition, becoming licensed is an achievement in the quality improvement journey. Parent Aware does not currently recognize all child care providers who have achieved this important milestone with a Star Rating.

Idea: Starting July 1, 2026, all licensed child care programs will automatically receive a One Star Rating. The idea is for the current One Star Rating requirements to no longer be required, and for all licensed programs in good standing with licensing to automatically receive a One Star Rating, unless they choose to apply for a higher Star Rating or opt out of being Rated. Programs that wish to opt out of the Automatic One Star Rating would have the option to check a box on a website.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative – when this change is implemented?
- d. What do you think this change will mean for...
 - i. Programs that are currently One-Star Rated? (i.e., What policies, processes, or messaging would be most helpful for programs that already earned a One-Star Rating through the current Rating process?)
 - ii. Programs that are currently Rated at Two Stars or higher? (i.e. do you think they are more likely to maintain their higher Rating, or choose to receive the Automatic One Star Rating?)
 - iii. Programs that are not currently Rated? (i.e., do you think programs not currently Rated are likely to accept the Automatic One Star Rating, or opt out? What incentives or supports might encourage currently unrated programs to seek a higher Star Rating?)

3. Topic 3 (Optional): Ensuring Rating requirements and monitoring processes for child care, Pre-K, and Head Start are closely aligned and not duplicative

Current: Parent Aware has different Rating Pathways for different program types, with some program types being required to document their quality for more indicators than other program types because each program type has different requirements in law. For example, because center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs are monitored by the Office of Head Start and have to adhere to federal Head Start Program Performance Standards, they can automatically receive a Four-Star Rating by way of an application that is built into existing annual monitoring processes in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education. No alignment chart of requirements across program types is published.

Problem: There is misunderstanding about the alignment between program types, with some program types feeling like they are required to do more to demonstrate their quality.

Idea: Publish an alignment chart that shows the processes and requirements for each program type, Head Start, school-based Pre-K, and accredited programs. The alignment chart would show how the requirements of each of the monitoring entities (e.g., the U.S. Office of Head Start for Head Start programs) would be leveraged to demonstrate quality for participation in Parent Aware. You can see the draft alignment chart here: [Quality Processes and Standards: Alignment Chart Draft](#), and you can review and share more feedback via the individual online survey after the session if you prefer.

Questions:

- a. Do you think publishing an alignment chart like the draft linked above will help clarify some of the misunderstandings about the Rating process for different types of programs?
- b. Is the draft alignment chart clear and understandable? What questions or suggestions do you have about the alignment chart and its purpose?
- c. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

4. Topic 4 (Optional): Supporting programs to provide quality learning environments that are culturally, linguistically, and ability affirming

Current: Child care programs may earn points towards a Three- or Four-Star Rating by conducting self-assessments of their learning environment and cultural responsiveness and then set goals based on the results.

Problem: Many programs have been in Parent Aware a long time and have already used the self-assessment tools offered (the Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Competency Self-Assessment or the Family and Community Engagement Tool [FaCET]).

Idea: With more assessment tools to choose from and more support to gather feedback from families, programs could learn more about their program on a variety of topics and develop more customized goals to improve their learning environment. For example, Parent Aware could offer a mix of observation tools (which would be conducted on-site by an observer) and self-assessment tools (which would be completed by the provider) that programs could choose from. Providers would work with a coach to complete and review results, co-create goals for improvement, and get connected to additional mentorship, consultation, referrals, and/or training. Program Ratings would not be impacted by their scores on these observations or self-assessments.

Below is a table of possible observation tools and self-assessment tools, including details about what kind of information each collects.

Tool Type	Tool Name and Link	Description
Observations (conducted an assessor or coach)	Environment Rating Scales, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) • Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) • Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) 	Supports early educators to improve learning environments in center-based settings. There are different tools for programs serving children of different age groups, and different program types.

	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension (ECERS-E)	Supports early educators serving preschool-aged children to measure quality through four curricular subscales for literacy, mathematics, science, and diversity.
	Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES)	Supports early educators to incorporate the cultural knowledge, experiences, and learning and communication styles of children from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.
	Teaching Pyramid Observation Tools, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) • Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) 	Supports early educators to use quality practices that support children’s social-emotional development and behavior. This tool is used to assess practices included in the Pyramid Model . There are different tools for early educators serving different age groups.
	Inclusive Classroom Profile	Supports early educators to use quality inclusion practices that support the developmental needs of children with disabilities in early childhood settings.
Self-assessment (conducted by child care and early education programs)	Nature-based Early Childhood Program Assessment & Guidebook provided by the Minnesota Children and Nature Connection	Supports early educators to incorporate nature into its philosophy and policies, family engagement and community connections, and the outdoor and indoor learning environments.
	Family and Community Engagement Tools (FaCET)	Supports early educators to assess their program’s child development, program quality, and family and community engagement.
	Universal Design for Learning Guidelines	Supports early educators to make learning inclusive and transformative for everyone.
	Parent Aware Environmental Self-Assessment	Supports early educators to improve learning environments.
	Cultural and Linguistic Competency Self-Assessment by the National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University	Supports early educators to promote cultural and linguistic competence in early intervention and early childhood settings.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change, and specifically the idea of having more tools to choose from to support quality improvement?
- b. Which tools or types of tools are you most interested in using if this option is provided? What kind of information or support would you need to make an informed choice about which tool to use to set goals for improvement?
- c. What else would you need to be successful if this change was made?

- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

5. Topic 5 (Optional): Supporting early educators to engage in ongoing family communication

Current: Programs earn points toward indicators for having family communication and engagement activities. Using a family survey is one option for family communication.

Problem: There is not a way to ensure families can provide anonymous feedback to child care and early education programs. In addition, Parent Aware does not have an indicator related to culturally affirming activities.

Idea: Parent Aware could support child care programs to offer family surveys in order to receive feedback on how well their family communication and engagement activities are working and gather information about how well their activities reflect children’s lives, abilities, and cultures. Providers’ ratings would not be impacted by the results of the family survey.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

6. Topic 6 (Optional): Expanding observations and coaching on child-adult interactions in all settings, but without being scored for Ratings

Current: Licensed, non-accredited child care centers with preschool classrooms seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating must be observed and achieve a minimum score on the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System or “CLASS,” an observation tool designed to assess the quality of adult-child interactions. Early educators may receive CLASS coaching to help them meet the CLASS scores required.

Problem: Because a minimum score is required, observations are stressful and high stakes for early educators working in center-based settings. Family child care providers are not observed, are not offered CLASS coaching, and wonder how the Star Rating could be accurate without an onsite visit.

Idea: Adult-child interactions are observed for all programs using one or more adult-child interaction observation tools. Programs would be provided data about adult-child interactions at their program and work with a coach to co-create goals for improvement. With this new approach, there would be no minimum scores programs would have to meet to earn a certain Rating. Rather, programs would get credit toward their Rating simply for being observed and for setting improvement goals based on the results in collaboration with a coach. A variety of different adult-child observation tools could be offered, including the CLASS, the Child Home Early

Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO), and the CHILD observation. See the table below for more information.

Observation Tool Name and Link	Description
Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS)	Support early educators to improve quality related to child-adult interactions in three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support.
Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO Pre-k) Child/Home Early Language and Literacy Observation Tool (CHELLO)	Supports use of quality literacy teaching practices. There are two separate tools, one for observation in preschool classrooms, and another one for use in home-based family child care settings.
Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning and Development (CHILD) Observation Tool	Supports early educators to the social and emotional climate of early care and education settings, such as warmth and friendship, a child-centered pedagogy, equitable treatment of children, and a focus on fostering children’s holistic development.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change, and specifically the idea of having both centers and family child care providers receive observations and offering programs their choice of which tool to use?
- b. From the table above, which tools or types of tools are you most interested in using if this option is provided? What kind of information or support would you need to make an informed choice about which tool to use to set goals for improvement?
- c. What else would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

7. Topic 7 (Optional): Supporting early educators’ and administrators’ growth and learning through training customized to meet their professional goals

Current: Programs participating in Parent Aware earn points toward their desired Rating when early educators and administrators have degrees, credentials, training, and other types of professional development. All family child care providers and lead teachers in child care centers are required to complete a certain number of training hours within the past five years in five Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) content areas. To earn a Three- or Four-Star Rating, for example, lead teachers must earn a total of 50 training hours in the past five years, with 10 hours in each of five KCF areas. (You can read more about Parent Aware’s current training hour requirements [here](#).)

Problem: Child care centers experience barriers to finding and retaining staff with degrees and training. Family child care providers and early educators experience barriers obtaining degrees, credentials, and completing training hours required by Parent Aware, especially related to cost and lack of time (i.e., a center teacher may be hired shortly before the Parent Aware Rating application

is due and there isn't enough time for the teacher to complete all the required trainings before the application deadline).

Idea: Shift the emphasis to supporting early educators and administrators with customized professional development plans to help them meet professional goals for themselves and for their programs that are set in collaboration with a professional development advisor and a coach. Early educators working in Parent Aware programs could meet requirements for professional development and training by having or completing a higher education degree, having a teaching license, OR completing 10 hours of training per year in an expanded number of KCF areas. Early educators would work with a professional development advisor to develop a professional development plan that includes plans to work toward a higher education degree, credential, or on-going training hours as well as to receive any additional support needed from a coach, mentor, or other resources. Hours spent with a coach or mentor would also count as training hours.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

8. Topic 8 (Optional): Supporting early educators and administrators to achieve economic, physical, and social-emotional well-being

Current: Parent Aware does not currently have indicators on this topic.

Problem: The level of staff turnover in early care and education settings is too high. Children do better when their child care and early education programs are stable and they have time to develop close emotional connections with their early educators. Early educators and administrators do better when they have stable jobs, with positive work environments that offer equitable compensation.

Idea: Early educators and administrators would assess their work environments using the Model Work Standards provided by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. There are separate standards available for center-based and family child care settings. The Model Work Standards tool acknowledges that the needs of children and the needs of their providers are interconnected. Using the results from this tool, programs would work with their coach to co-create goals, including at least one goal related to improving the working environment and at least one goal related to wages and benefits. Any goal related to wages and benefits would be unique for center-based programs compared to family child care programs because they have very different operating structures and expenditures. Coaches would be well versed in supporting early educators to apply for a REETAIN bonus, and, for eligible programs, to apply for additional monthly compensation through the Great Start Compensation program (a program funded by the Minnesota Legislature where centers and family child care providers can receive a monthly payment in which the explicit purpose is to increase the compensation and benefits of early childhood educators).

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

9. Topic 9 (Optional): Supportive behavior guidance practices

Current: Parent Aware does not have indicators related to behavior guidance. Child care programs are referred to the Center for Inclusive Child Care and Mental Health Consultation for help with behavior guidance.

Problem: Too many young children are suspended or expelled from child care and early education settings, and research shows this occurs more often to children of color, those who speak a language other than English, and those who have special needs.

Idea: Parent Aware could promote programs' use of trauma-informed, positive behavior guidance rather than exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion. Programs would be supported to have written policies related to using positive guidance practices. The policy would include methods for promoting positive child, staff and family relationships; strategies supporting positive behavior and peer interactions; and supports for children and staff. The policy would include a way to support families to move to a different setting if it is determined, in partnership with the family, that a child care setting is not able to meet a child's needs. Access to training on positive behavior guidance and trauma-informed care, along with coaching and mental health consultation to help administrators and early educators use positive behavior guidance practices, would be widely available.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. What would you need to be successful if this change was made?
- c. Would there be barriers for you to participate in Parent Aware if this proposed change was adopted?
- d. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- e. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?

10. Topic 10 (Optional): Provide more search options on the Parent Aware website to allow families to search for things that make programs unique

Current: The Parent Aware website is designed to encourage families to prioritize Star Ratings in their search for child care and early education programs for their children, with a small number of additional search criteria to help them narrow their search. Programs can share things that are unique about them in their philosophy statement, but families cannot search in a way that allows them to easily find programs using the information in the philosophy statement.

Problem: Quality can mean different things to different families, depending on their children's needs. Parent Aware does not currently offer a wide variety of search criteria that would help families find programs that meet their unique needs.

Idea: Parent Aware could offer ways for child care and early education programs to provide more information about their programs in a way that is searchable for families. For example, families with children with special needs may be interested in searching for programs with early educators with training or education specifically on serving children with special needs. Or they may wish to find programs using a particular curriculum, or that spend significant amounts of time outdoors each day. Programs with these characteristics would share this information in the Parent Aware application process, and the Parent Aware website would allow families to include these features in the search criteria they select.

Questions:

- a. What is your initial reaction to this proposed change?
- b. If this feature is offered, are there search criteria you would want to make sure are offered?
- c. Can you think of any unintended consequences – either positive or negative - if this change is implemented?
- d. What other ideas do you have to address the problem?