

Parent Aware Ratings and Standards and Indicators: A Multi-Cohort Analysis

*Findings from an Evaluation of Parent Aware,
Minnesota's QRIS*

Shreya Mukhopadhyay, Rowan Hilty, Jennifer Cleveland,
and Kathryn Tout

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Introduction

Background

Parent Aware, Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), is designed to rate the quality of care provided in the state's early care and education (ECE) programs, to help connect families with high-quality care that meets their needs, and to support programs' ongoing quality improvement. Parent Aware assigns quality rating levels in ECE settings by awarding programs a One- to Four-Star Rating; Ratings are determined by programs' ability to meet quality Indicators within five Categories of program Standards (see Textbox 1). Currently, all licensed ECE programs¹ in Minnesota can choose whether to participate in Parent Aware² and the Star Rating level to which they apply. As a "hybrid" QRIS, each Parent Aware Standard contains some Indicators that all programs must meet, as well as other Indicators that programs can choose to meet. In particular, programs seeking a One- or Two-Star Rating must meet all Indicators at their desired Rating level, whereas programs seeking a Three- or Four-Star must meet certain required Indicators and also earn a certain number of points.³

Quality Standards and Indicators are an integral part of Parent Aware. The Standards and Indicators not only provide a framework for defining quality in ECE settings, but also create a structure for helping families make informed decisions about child care⁴ and for supporting programs in ongoing quality improvement. As such, it is important that Parent Aware regularly examines and updates the Standards and Indicators to ensure they are evidence-based, reflective of the diverse needs of children and families, and meaningful and attainable to the ECE programs and staff who work toward meeting them.

Since Parent Aware started as a pilot program in 2007, the Standards and Indicators have been revised twice. The Standards and Indicators were updated most recently in 2016, informed in part by findings from an evaluation conducted by researchers at Child Trends.⁵ As part of the Parent Aware Redesign launched in 2023,⁶ the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has been examining the Standards and Indicators to consider updates. This effort builds off work completed as part of the Parent Aware Racial Equity Action Plan, which aims to understand inequities or barriers within Parent Aware and develop plans for improvement.

Textbox 1. Parent Aware Categories for Program Quality

- Health & Well-being
- Relationships with Families
- Teaching & Relationships with Children
- Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child
- Professionalism

¹ Parent Aware is available for family child care and center-based programs that are licensed through the Minnesota Department of Human Services, certified child care programs, Head Start programs, and public school-based pre-K programs.

² The Minnesota Legislature recently passed a bill that will automatically assign all licensed child care programs a One-Star Rating unless the program opts out of the system. The legislation requires additional research on the impacts and costs of this policy change to inform a final process for implementing the change by July 2026. See Child Care Aware of Minnesota's 2023 Legislative update for more information: <https://www.childcareawaremn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Final-2023-Legislative-Update-FINAL.pdf>

³ Minnesota Department of Human Services. (2016). Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System: Standards and Indicators. <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrserver/Public/DHS-6346B-ENG>

⁴ The Standards and Indicators are used on parentaware.org to provide information about each Rating level: <https://www.parentaware.org/learn/stars-defined/>

⁵ For more information about the Parent Aware Redesign and the Standards and Indicators Revision process, see the DHS website: <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/child-care-and-early-education/parent-aware/pa-standards-and-indicators/>

⁶ Read more about the Parent Aware Redesign here: <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/child-care-and-early-education/parent-aware/>

Purpose

The Minnesota DHS contracted with Child Trends in 2022 to conduct an independent evaluation of Parent Aware to explore its effectiveness in supporting the state’s children, families, and ECE workforce. As part of this evaluation, our team at Child Trends conducted an analysis of Rating and Indicator data for programs earning Parent Aware Star Ratings in nine Full-Rating Cohorts^{7,8} from January 2019 (Ratings issued June 30, 2019) through January 2023 (Ratings issued June 30, 2023). The purpose of this report is to share findings from this analysis that demonstrate how programs select Indicators to earn points that translate to their requested Star Ratings.

In this report, we discuss how programs were rated, how previous Ratings related to earned Ratings (see Textbox 2 for definitions), how programs performed on different Indicators, which optional Indicators programs commonly “opted-out” of, and any differences across program types. Programs are required to renew their Ratings every two years, although programs at the One-, Two-, or Three-Star Level may choose to apply earlier for a new Rating.⁹

With this in mind, our team also examined programs that earned multiple Re-Ratings during the study timeframe to identify any trends in Ratings over time. Specifically, we address the following **research questions** in this report:

- What do programs’ requested and earned Ratings look like over time?
- How do programs’ requested Ratings compare to their earned Ratings?
- How do programs’ previous Ratings compare to their earned Ratings?
- How many points did Three- and Four-Star Rated programs earn, by Category and in total?
- Which Indicators-for-points at the Three- and Four-Star levels are programs “opting out” of and, where relevant, how many points were earned?

Textbox 2. Definitions for previous, requested, and earned Ratings

Previous Rating: Some programs already had a Parent Aware Rating when they applied for a new Rating. We use the term “previous Rating” to refer to those past Ratings.

Requested Rating: When programs apply for a Re-Rating, they request a specific Rating and submit materials accordingly. We refer to these as “requested Ratings” in this report.

Earned Rating: The Ratings that programs earn based on the materials they submit to Parent Aware for Rating are referred to as “earned Ratings.”

⁷ Most child care centers and family child care programs are Rated through the Full-Rating Pathway, which uses a Cohort model to support programs through the Rating process, including submitting documentation to demonstrate they are meeting the required Indicators to achieve their desired Rating. Some programs (e.g., Head Start/Early Head Start, Public School Pre-K, accredited programs) are eligible to become Rated via the Accelerated or Automatic Pathways, which involve less documentation requirements because those programs are monitored by other entities. This report focuses on data from those programs seeking a Rating through the Full-Rating Pathway only.

⁸ The word “Cohort” is used to represent when a program submitted documents for evaluation and subsequently received a Rating. Programs can only start the Rating process in January or July. They submit their materials by March-April (January Cohorts) or September-October (July Cohorts) and receive their Rating on June 30th (January Cohorts) or December 31st (July Cohorts). Thus, for example, programs that apply for a Rating in January 2024 are part of the “January 2024” Cohort, and they would submit their documentation by March-April 2024 and receive their Rating on June 30, 2024.

⁹ See the Parent Aware website for more information: <https://www.parentaware.org/programs/tips-for-fully-rated-programs>

Methods

The report summarizes analyses of Parent Aware Rating data for programs that earned a Parent Aware Rating through the Full-Rating Pathway between June 30, 2019 (January 2019 Cohort) and June 30, 2023 (January 2023 Cohort). Because our goal was to understand how programs select Indicators and earn points as part of the Rating process, we included all Ratings and Re-Ratings issued during that timeframe in our analysis.

As we examined all Ratings and Re-Ratings issued, some programs had multiple data points in the study sample based on the number of times they applied for Ratings during the study period. Across the nine Cohorts included in this analysis, a total of 2,162 unique programs went through the Full-Rating process at least one time (1,603 unique family child care programs and 559 unique child care centers).¹⁰ As shown in Table 1, programs went through the Rating process between one and five times across the nine Cohorts, with some programs earning only an initial Rating (41%), and other programs earning one or more Re-Ratings during the study timeframe (59%).

Table 1. Number of Ratings and Re-Ratings earned by program type

Number of Ratings & Re-Ratings	Unique Programs	Unique Centers	Unique Family Child Care
Initial Rating only	888 (41%)	187 (33%)	701 (44%)
Initial Rating and one Re-Rating	913 (42%)	270 (48%)	643 (40%)
Initial Rating and two Re-Ratings	336 (16%)	81 (15%)	255 (16%) ¹¹
Initial Rating and three Re-Ratings	23 (1%)	21 (4%)	2 (<1%)
Initial Rating and four Re-Ratings	2 (<1%)	0 (0%)	2 (<1%)
Total	2,162	559	1,603

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

The programs in the sample earned a total of 3,824 Ratings and Re-Ratings across the nine Cohorts. This includes 976 Ratings and Re-Ratings of licensed child care centers and 2,848 Ratings and Re-Ratings of licensed family child care programs. Details about the number of Ratings and Re-Ratings by Cohort and program type are summarized in Table 2.

¹⁰ Additionally, 51 of the Ratings and Re-Ratings were for programs that were tribally affiliated (two unique centers and 27 unique family child care programs). In our analyses, we grouped these programs with centers or family child care programs as appropriate.

¹¹ One program with an initial Rating and two Re-Ratings submitted for evaluation as a family child care program the first two times (January 2019 and January 2021) and as a child care center the last time (January 2023). The table includes this program as a child care center in Table 1 since that was the most recent classification. For the remaining analyses, the three data points are counted separately, with two entries as a family child care and one entry as a child care center.

Table 2. Number of Ratings by Program Type and Cohort (n=3,824)

Cohort	Number of Programs	
	Family Child Care	Centers
January 2019	329	112
July 2019	321	83
January 2020	418	129
July 2020	286	102
January 2021	332	113
July 2021	269	91
January 2022	300	100
July 2022	276	104
January 2023	317	142
Total	2,848	976

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Note: The Ratings include both first Ratings as well as Re-Ratings when programs applied for multiple Ratings during the study period. However, within a Cohort, one program only applied for one Rating, thus, the number of programs are the same as the number of Ratings.

All data included in this analysis were from Develop, Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Registry System, and provided to our team by DHS. The data contained information on all programs that earned a Parent Aware Rating across nine Cohorts, including program-level characteristics, Ratings sought and earned, and information about the specific Indicators that programs met or did not meet to earn a Rating. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Stata v16. Significant differences between the Full-Rating Cohorts were identified using ANOVA tests and Multivariate Regressions on Stata v16. Significant differences were determined using a threshold of $p < .05$.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Changes over time in requested and earned Ratings

Programs most often request and earn higher Ratings with each Re-Rating attempt.

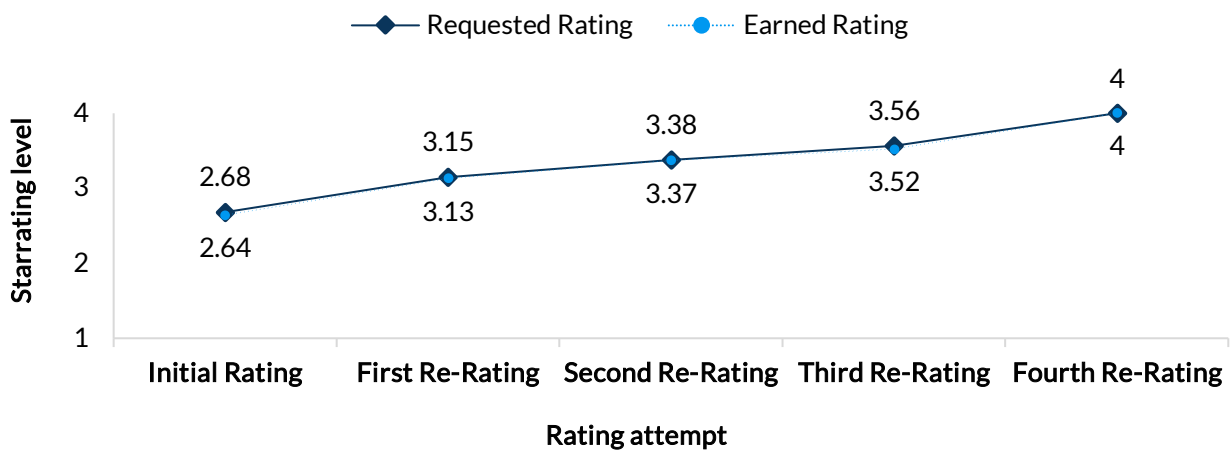
A total of 1,274 programs earned an initial Rating and at least one Re-Rating during the study period. The Child Trends team examined the requested and earned Ratings over time to understand how these changed with each subsequent Re-Rating. Overall, the Star Rating level that programs requested increased over time ($F=9.55, p < .001$) as did the Rating that programs earned ($F=9.04, p < .001$). In other words, programs that applied for more than one Rating (i.e., one or more Re-Ratings) during the study period usually requested a higher Rating and also earned a higher Rating with each Re-Rating. Of note, Table 3 and Figure 1 show that the average requested and average earned Ratings, and thus, might not be whole numbers.

Table 3. Average requested and earned Ratings across Ratings and Re-Ratings (n=1,274)¹²

Rating	Initial Rating	First Re-Rating	Second Re-Rating	Third Re-Rating	Fourth Re-Rating
Average Requested Rating	2.68	3.15	3.38	3.56	4
Average Earned Rating	2.64	3.13	3.37	3.52	4

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Figure 1. Changes in requested and earned Ratings



Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Requested versus earned Ratings

Most centers request a Four-Star Rating, whereas family child care programs commonly request Ratings across Star Levels.

In examining requested vs. earned Ratings in child care centers and family child care programs, there were some notable differences in requested Ratings by program type. As shown in Table 4, family child care programs' requested Ratings were relatively evenly split across Star Rating Levels, with around half requesting a One- or Two-Star Rating (n=1,349, 47%) and the remaining half requesting a Three- or Four-Star Rating (n=1,499, 53%). There was far less variation in child care centers' requested Ratings (see Table 5). Only 18 percent of centers requested a One- or Two-Star Rating (n=174), and 82 percent requested a Three- or Four-Star Rating (n=802), with the majority of these programs requesting a Four-Star Rating (71%).

¹² Of note, Table 3 and Figure 3 show the average of all the Initial Ratings, and the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Re-Ratings. Thus, these Ratings might not be whole numbers.

Most programs earned the Rating they requested.

Most programs earned their requested Rating, across both family child care programs and centers as well as Rating levels. Among family child care programs, nearly all programs earned the Rating that they requested across Rating Levels (97%-99%; see Table 4). Similarly, among child care centers, nearly all programs earned their requested Ratings across levels (92%-98%; see Table 5). Across Rating levels and program types, less than one percent of programs earned a Star Rating above their requested Rating. Only around two percent of family child care programs (n=45) and four percent of child care centers (n=36) earned a Rating lower than their requested Rating (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Family child care programs' requested vs. earned Ratings (n=2,848)

Requested Rating	Earned Rating				Total
	One-Star	Two-Star	Three-Star	Four-Star	
One-Star	512 (>99%)	1 (<1%)	0	0	513
Two-Star	13 (2%)	823 (98%)	0	0	836
Three-Star	0	14 (2%)	711 (98%)	2 (<1%)	727
Four-Star	2 (<1%)	3	13 (2%)	754 (98%)	772
Total	527 (19%)	841 (30%)	724 (25%)	756 (26%)	2848

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Table 5. Child care centers' requested vs. earned Ratings (n=976)

Requested Rating	Earned Rating				Total
	One-Star	Two-Star	Three-Star	Four-Star	
One-Star	46 (98%)	1 (2%)	0	0	47
Two-Star	3 (2%)	124 (98%)	0	0	127
Three-Star	1 (<1%)	4 (4%)	97 (92%)	3 (3%)	105
Four-Star	2 (<1%)	8 (1%)	18 (3%)	669 (96%)	697
Total	52 (5%)	137 (14%)	115 (12%)	672 (69%)	976

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Previous versus earned Ratings

Most programs earned or exceeded their previous Rating level.

Most programs earned or exceeded their previous Star Rating (see Tables 6 and 7). Only six percent of family child care programs and four percent of child care centers earned a Star Rating lower than their previous Rating. Of note, less than one percent of family child care programs that previously held a Four-Star Rating earned a lower Rating, compared to three percent of centers. Among programs applying for an initial Parent Aware Rating, most family child care programs earned a One- or Two-Star Rating (79%), whereas most centers earned a Four-Star Rating (50%; see the “Null/No Rating” rows in Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Family child care programs’ previous vs. earned Ratings (n=2,848)

Previous Rating	Earned Rating				Total
	One-Star	Two-Star	Three-Star	Four-Star	
Null/No Rating	322 (46%)	235 (33%)	90 (13%)	55 (8%)	702
One-Star	132 (32%)	246 (59%)	25 (6%)	11 (3%)	414
Two-Star	50 (8%)	312 (49%)	233 (37%)	43 (7%)	638
Three-Star	17 (2%)	39 (6%)	337 (50%)	285 (42%)	678
Four-Star	6 (1%)	9 (2%)	39 (9%)	362 (87%)	416
Total	527 (19%)	841 (29%)	724 (25%)	756 (27%)	2,848

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Table 7. Child care centers’ previous vs. earned Ratings (n=976)

Previous Rating	Earned Rating				Total
	One-Star	Two-Star	Three-Star	Four-Star	
Null/No Rating	29 (12.5%)	60 (25%)	28 (12.5%)	118 (50%)	235
One-Star	16 (30%)	26 (48%)	7 (13%)	5 (9%)	54
Two-Star	4 (4%)	36 (32%)	37 (33%)	36 (32%)	113
Three-Star	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	27 (25%)	79 (73%)	108
Four-Star	3 (<1%)	13 (3%)	16 (3%)	434 (93%)	466
Total	52 (5%)	137 (14%)	115 (12%)	672 (69%)	976

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

We also conducted a multivariate regression¹³ and found that both previous Ratings ($b=.02$, $b^*=.03$, $p<0.001$)¹⁴ and requested Ratings ($b=.97$, $b^*=.96$, $p<0.001$) predicted earned Ratings ($R^2=.96$, $F[2, 2,933]=39,227.08$, $p<0.001$), although the requested Ratings were a stronger predictor than previous Ratings.

¹³ These analyses were conducted with a subsample of programs that applied for one Rating and the initial Rating of programs that applied for multiple Ratings during our study period to avoid issues related to dependency.

¹⁴ b indicates the unstandardized regression coefficient and b^* indicates the standardized regression coefficient.

Programs' points earned toward Ratings

Programs requesting a Three- or Four-Star Rating in Parent Aware must achieve a certain number of points to achieve their desired Rating, both within each of the five Categories of program Standards and overall. For Three- and Four-Star Ratings, programs must earn at least two points in each of the five Standard Categories, and additional point requirements vary by program type and Rating level. For a Three-Star Rating, family child care programs must earn 25-34 points, and centers must earn 33-48 points. For a Four-Star Rating, family child care programs must earn 35-50 points, and centers must earn 49-65 points.¹⁵ A full description of the [Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System: Standards and Indicators](#) is available on the Minnesota DHS' website.

This structure allows programs the flexibility to choose which Indicators to meet for points and which to “opt out” of. Understanding trends about Indicators that programs commonly meet and which they commonly “opt out” of can provide important insights to inform DHS' updates to Parent Aware's Standards and Indicators.

To understand how programs earn points toward their requested Star Ratings, we first examined the points programs earned across program types and Rating levels. Figures 4 and 5 show the average percentage of the possible points earned in each Category and in total. For example, in Figure 4, a total of six points were possible for the Category “Teaching and Relationships with Children,” and Three-Star family child care programs earned an average of 5.2 (87%) points on this Standard.

Of note, the points possible for the Category “Teaching and Relationships with Children” varies by program type and were affected by Parent Aware policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. This Category includes the Indicator “Child-adult interactions”(T2.3), which is measured by completing an observation of the classroom and scored using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) Observation Tool.^{16,17} This Indicator only applies to child care centers. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and stay-at-home orders during the pandemic, this tool has not been used since the January 2020 Cohort. Therefore, for family child care providers, the maximum possible points for the Category “Teaching and Relationships with Children” is six points (see Figure 4). Child care centers are separated into two groups: those not affected by COVID-19 (January 2019 and July 2019 Cohorts) with a maximum of 21 points possible, and those affected by COVID-19 (Cohorts from January 2020 onward) with a maximum of six points possible (see Figures 5a-b).

Trends in the points program earn by Rating level and program type align with the patterns expected based on varying point requirements.

Figures 2, 3a, and 3b¹⁸ depict the scores earned by programs in each Category by Star Level, with family child care programs depicted in Figure 2 and child care centers depicted in Figures 3a and 3b. Since the different Categories have different maximum points possible, the figures depict the average score earned

¹⁵ Parent Aware. (2022). *Parent Aware Rating Guide: Full-Rating Pathway Quality Documentation Portfolio (January 2022 update)*. https://www.parentaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Full-Rating-QDP-JANUARY-2022_FINAL.pdf

¹⁶ For Indicator T2.3 (*Child-adult interactions*), child care centers are rated using the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS®). The original scores for each of the three domains (Emotional support, Classroom organization, and Instructional support) are recoded on a 5-point scale (0 to 5). The final scale score is on a 15-point scale (0 to 15) which is calculated by summing up the three domain scores.

¹⁷ Parent Aware. (2022). *Parent Aware Rating Guide: Full-Rating Pathway Quality Documentation Portfolio (January 2022 update)*, 33. https://www.parentaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Full-Rating-QDP-JANUARY-2022_FINAL.pdf

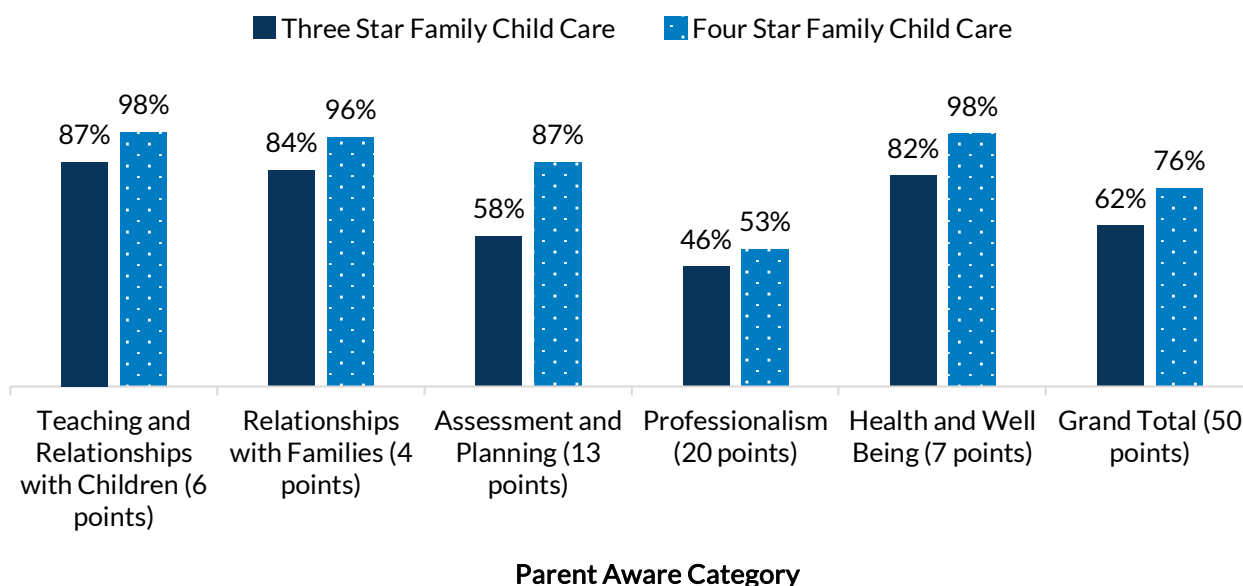
¹⁸ We were unable to run significance testing on these data as some programs submitted for Ratings multiple times during our study period, thus introducing dependence in the data.

divided by the maximum possible scores on the Category (in other words, the percentage of possible points earned, on average). For example, the average score earned by Three-Star Rated family child care programs in the “Teaching and Relationships with Children” Category was 5.22, and the maximum possible score was six; in Figure 2, this is depicted as 5.22 divided by six, or 87 percent.

When comparing Three- and Four-Star Rated programs, Three-Star Rated programs earned a lower proportion of the possible scores on all the Categories and in total across both program types. This finding is expected, as the point requirements for a Three-Star Rating are lower than the requirements for a Four-Star Rating. Furthermore, family child care programs earned a lower proportion of the possible points compared to child care centers across all Categories and in total, again following expected trends since family child care programs need fewer points to achieve each Rating level than centers.

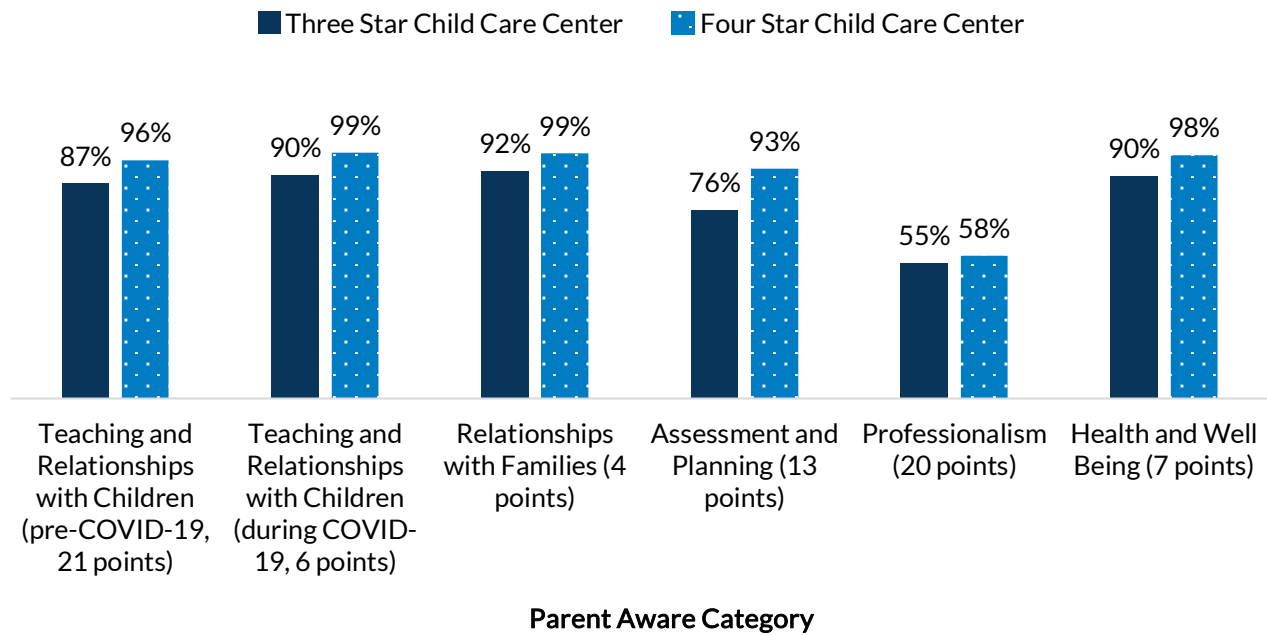
Turning to specific Categories, among both family child care programs and child care centers, programs earned the least points in the “Professionalism” Category. Among both family child care programs and child care centers, Three-Star programs earned few points on the “Assessment and Planning” Category, with the biggest difference between Three-Star Rated family child care programs (earned 58% of possible points on average) and Four-Star family child care programs (87% of possible points on average).

Figure 2. Percent of possible points earned by Three- and Four-Star Rated family child care programs, in each Category and in total



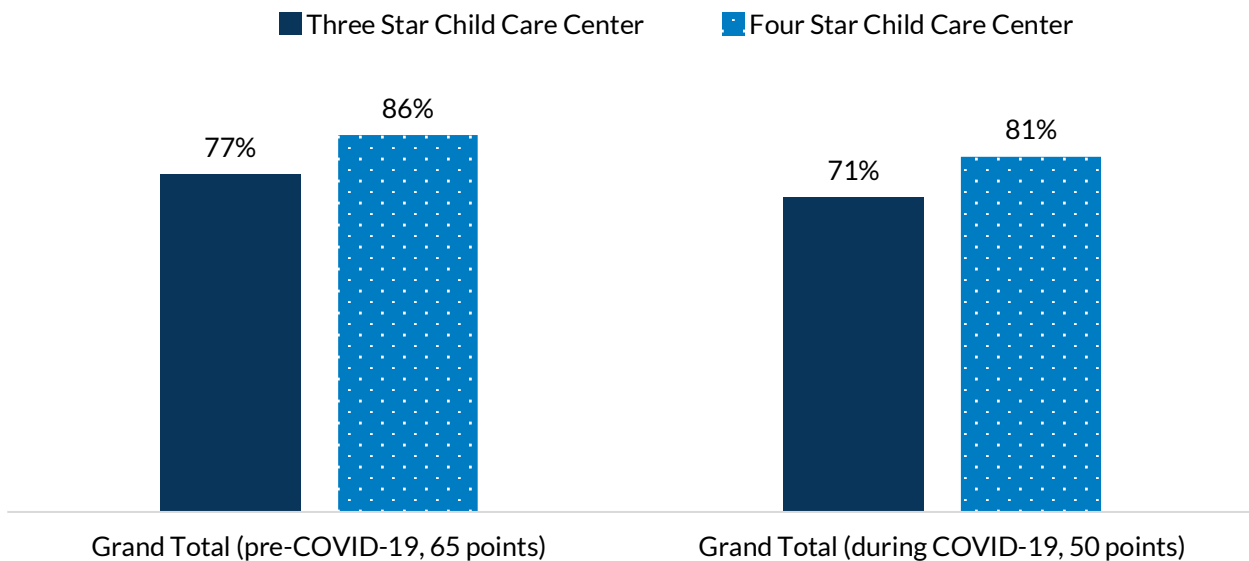
Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Figure 3a. Percent of possible points earned by Three- and Four-Star Rated child care centers in each Category



Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Figure 3b. Percent of possible points earned by Three- and Four-Star Rated child care centers in total, before and during COVID-19



Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Indicators commonly “opted-out” of by programs

As mentioned, programs seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating can choose which Indicators they want to meet to earn points, and alternatively, which they want to “opt-out” of. Table 8 shows how many Three- and Four-Star family child care programs and child care centers “opted-out” of the different optional Indicators-for-points. Overall, family child care programs “opted-out” of more Indicators at a higher rate than child care centers. This would be expected since family child care programs need fewer points to receive the same Rating as a child care center, and therefore have more flexibility in the number of Indicators they can “opt-out” of.¹⁹

¹⁹ Parent Aware. (2022). Parent Aware Rating Guide: Full-rating pathway quality documentation portfolio (January 2022 update). https://www.parentaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Full-Rating-QDP-JANUARY-2022_FINAL.pdf

Table 8. Three- and Four-Star Rated programs “opting out” of Indicators-for-points

Indicators-for-Points	Percent of Programs “Opting Out”	
	Family Child Care (n=1,480)	Child Care Centers (n=787)
Teaching and Relationships with Children		
T2.3. Child-adult interactions (15 points)	N/A	4%
T3.3. Cultural responsiveness (2 points)	13%	2%
T4.3. Kindergarten transition activities (4 points)	4%	1%
Relationships with Families		
R1.3a. Family involvement (2 points)	6%	1%
R1.3b. Family input (2 points)	12%	2%
Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child		
A1.3b. Providing assessment to families (2 points)	6%	1%
A1.3c. Asks for parent input (2 points)	21%	7%
A1.3d. Kindergarten Entry Profile tool (3 points)	42%	22%
A1.3e. Planning for children with special needs (2 points)	15%	2%
A2.3a. Assessment-based individualized instruction (2 points)	32%	9%
A2.3b. Assessment-based group instruction (2 points)	38%	8%
Professionalism		
P1.3a. Specialized credential (3 points)	97%	81%
P1.3b. Education for leadership (3 points)	83%	50%
P1.3c. Program development (3 points)	8%	2%
P2.3a. Career Lattice Achievements (9 points)	<1%	0%
P2.3b. Highly qualified (2 points)	83%	90%
Health and Well-being		
H2.3a. Healthy food (2 points)	2%	4%
H2.3b. Sharing information about healthy food (2 points)	7%	2%
H2.3c. Nutrition and active play (3 points)	16%	2%

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

Programs most commonly “opt-out”²⁰ of Indicators in the Professionalism category.

Both family child care programs and child care centers most commonly opted out of Indicators from the category “Professionalism.” Within that category, family child care programs most commonly opted out of the “Specialized credential”(P1.3a, 97%), with “Education for leadership”(P1.3b) and “Highly Qualified” following closely (P2.3b; 83% “opted out” of each). Child care centers most commonly opted out of “Highly Qualified”(P2.3b, 90%), followed by “Specialized credential”(P1.3a, 81%) and then “Education for leadership”(P1.3b, 50%). Additional context about the requirements for providers to achieve these and other commonly “opted-out” of Indicators is provided in Figure 6.

Other Indicators that programs commonly “opted-out” of included those in the category “Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child,” especially among family child care programs. These Indicators included “Kindergarten Entry Profile tool”(A1.3d, 42%), “Assessment-based group instruction”(A2.3b, 38%), and “Assessment-based individualized instruction”(A2.3a, 32%). See Table 9 for more details about these Indicators-for-points.

Table 9. Description of Indicators-for-points that programs commonly “opt-out” of

“Professionalism” Category Indicators	
P1.3a. Specialized credential (3 points)	Program director or lead provider qualifications must include either an Administrator’s Credential recognized by NAEYC or the Business Leadership Credential offered by First Children’s Finance
P1.3b. Education for leadership (3 points)	Program Director, Lead Provider, or Education Coordinator has a four-year degree or higher with at least 24 ECE-related verified semester credits
P2.3b. Highly qualified (2 points)	Lead Providers or Lead Teachers must have earned at least a Bachelor’s, Master’s or Doctorate in early childhood education, child development, or closely related field, or alternatively, a Minnesota Teaching License
“Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child” Category Indicators	
A1.3d. Kindergarten Entry Profile tool (3 points)	Programs/Centers must provide information about how they assess each child based on the assessment tools available on the Kindergarten Entry Profile tool
A1.3e. Planning for children with special needs (2 points)	Programs/Centers must document how they partner with families and service providers of children with special needs in their program/center
A2.3a. Assessment-based individualized instruction (2 points)	Programs/Centers must provide evidence (such as activity cards or individualized notes on lesson plans) to demonstrate that they inform their individual lesson plans based on information obtained from individual child assessments
A2.3b. Assessment-based group instruction (2 points)	Programs/Centers must provide evidence (such as goal statements or activities to accomplish a goal) to demonstrate that they inform their group lesson plans based on information aggregated from all child assessments.

Source: Parent Aware. (2022). Parent Aware Rating Guide: Full-Rating Pathway Quality Documentation Portfolio (January 2022 update). https://www.parentaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Full-Rating-QDP-JANUARY-2022_FINAL.pdf.

²⁰ When Programs submit documentation online in Develop as part of their Quality Documentation Portfolio (QDP), they are instructed to select an “Opt-Out” checkbox when they are not seeking credit for a particular Indicator.

Finally, two Indicators are evaluated in a way that programs may earn partial points, unlike all other Indicators, where programs could earn either all or none of the points— “Child-adult interactions” (T2.3) and “Career Lattice Achievements” (P2.3a). “Child-adult interactions” (T2.3) is an Indicator that is only applicable to child care centers; within those programs, it applied only to two Cohorts of child care centers (January 2019 and July 2019, n=137) due to COVID-19 restrictions. Child care centers from these two Cohorts earned an average of 13.61 points, out of 15²¹ possible points for their scores on the CLASS® tool. For the Indicator “Career Lattice Achievements” (P2.3a), family child care programs earned an average of 6.27 points and child care centers earned an average of 6.42 points, out of 9 points possible for their average career lattice step.

Key Takeaways & Future Implications

As Minnesota continues efforts to update and improve Parent Aware’s Standards and Indicators, it is important to consider historical trends in Ratings. Exploring variation in what Rating levels programs request and earn, alongside the Indicators they select to achieve those Ratings, may shed light on barriers or challenges that exist for providers in addressing particular quality Indicators.

Our findings show that **a larger number of family child care programs earned Ratings during the study time period** (n=1,603 unique programs with 2,848 Ratings) compared to centers (n=558 unique programs with 976 Ratings), although **a much higher percentage of child care centers earned a Three- or Four-Star Rating** (69% of Ratings) compared to family child care programs (26% of Ratings). Our findings also show that **most programs earned the Ratings they requested**. This suggests that efforts to increase the supply of high-quality care in the state should **focus on understanding what combination of coaching and support helps programs seek and earn higher Ratings**. However, further research is needed to explore what factors support programs to aim for and earn higher Ratings. It may be helpful, for example, to interview Quality Coaches and providers directly to learn more about what supports and guidance help them apply for a higher Rating and conversely, what concerns or barriers they face. A qualitative approach could also be useful to understand the factors that influence programs’ decision-making related to Ratings, such as funding and incentive structures, messaging and support from coaches and other Parent Aware staff, or perceptions of Parent Aware and the value of higher Ratings. Additional engagement with providers and coaches could help answer questions such as how programs communicate with families. Exploring these topics could not only inform revisions to the Rating process that help ease barriers for programs and centers to become Rated but also shape guidance for Quality Coaches and other Parent Aware support staff in how to effectively message Parent Aware and support programs through the Rating process.

Our analyses showed that across program types, **programs most commonly “opted-out” of Indicators-for-points in the “Professionalism” Category**. On the other hand, **programs commonly opted *into* Indicators in the “Teaching and Relationships with Children,” “Relationships with Families,” and “Health and Well-being” Categories**. Further research is required to explore what is behind such decisions. For example, Indicators in the “Professionalism” Category might take a longer time for programs to achieve than other options. Investigating differences in the difficulties and barriers, as well as perceived benefits in submitting documentation for Indicators like “Teaching and Relationships with Children,” “Relationships with Families,” and “Health and Well-being” versus the Indicators of “Professionalism” could provide deeper insights into what supports might help increase participation for the “Professionalism” Category. Further, this could also advance equity within Parent Aware by shedding light on differences among sub-groups of programs that submit documentation for some Indicators over others. Hearing directly from programs about how they make decisions related to the Rating process could help Parent Aware leaders identify strategies to increase

²¹ Indicator T2.3, “Child-adult interactions” are rated using CLASS®. The original scores for each of the three domains (Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support) are recoded on a five-point scale (0 to 5). The final scale score is on a 15-point scale (0 to 15) which is calculated by summing up the three domain scores.

the availability of support for programs to earn points for certain Indicators, or conversely, suggest Indicators that may need to be modified to make sure they are meaningful and attainable for programs.

Allowing programs to choose which Rating to request and which Indicators will be scored for Ratings offers some degree of flexibility, which may be particularly important to programs that are participating in Parent Aware for the first time and therefore early in their quality improvement process. Such a possibility should be investigated to learn more about how new programs choose their target Ratings and the Indicators they select to earn those Ratings.

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