



Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System: Standards and Indicators

February 2026

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Part One: Background

Introduction

Parent Aware, Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), provides a common set of program standards for child care and early education programs and is supported by a mission.

Information in this report was developed in partnership with many interested parties. The update of the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators was carried out by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families, in coordination with the Minnesota Departments of Education and Health. These agencies worked closely with an advisory group representing early care and education programs, and early educators from across Minnesota. They also relied heavily on feedback gathered through public engagement.

Terminology

Terms like “child care provider” and “early educator” are often used interchangeably to describe individuals working in early care and education programs that foster children’s development, including home-based, center-based and school-based programs. Through public engagement, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families received feedback that the term “early educator” is the preferred term among many child care and early education professionals to be used across all types of early care and education. For purposes of this document, the following terms are used to describe individuals working in these settings:

- **Early educator:** describes individuals working in all early care and education settings, regardless of program type.
- **Lead provider:** when a licensed family child care program has more than one early educator providing care and education with children, this is the person in the lead role. In family child care settings this is most often the same person as the license-holder(s) or business owner(s).
- **Lead teacher:** when a licensed child care center has more than one early educator working in a classroom, this is the person designated by the program as being in the lead role.
- **Director:** describes individuals who run licensed child care centers.
- **Education Coordinator:** describes individuals who support implementation of the instruction and curriculum provided by a child care center.
- **Family child care license-holder:** describes an individual who holds a family child care license and runs the family child care program.

Parent Aware Mission

Parent Aware, Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, offers tools and resources to help:

- Families find quality child care and early education
- Programs improve their practices

Together, these supports help set children up for success in school and beyond.

Successful Learner Equation

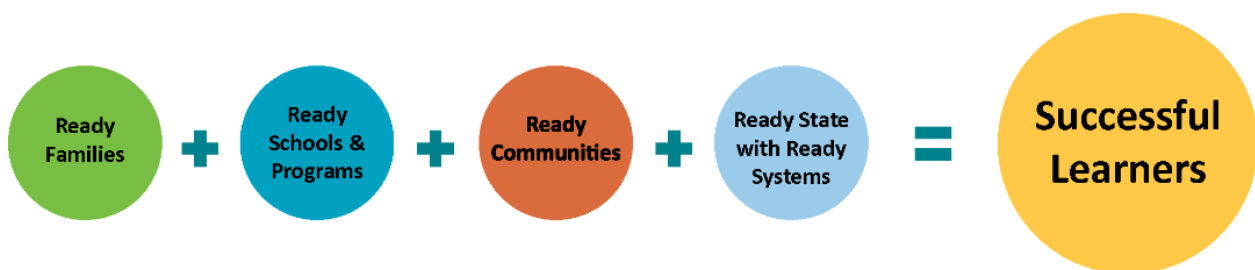
The Successful Learner Equation is used to recognize and uplift the individuals, programs and systems that contribute to the success of young learners. Parent Aware is one part of the early care and education system, which holds this important responsibility.

The Successful Learner Equation is grounded in the following beliefs:

- Child care and schools should be inclusive, welcoming and joyful for all.
- Children are always learning.
- Each child has unique skills and knowledge from their home life, culture, opportunities and life experiences.
- A strengths-based mindset is critical to supporting children and families.
- Diversity of all types should be celebrated.
- Adults and systems should support all children and families wherever they are in their learning progression.
- Instruction should be developmentally appropriate, supported by research and individualized.

There are four interconnected components that foster successful learners:

- Ready families: Establish the foundation for their child’s health, development and learning within the context of their family’s cultural values, norms and beliefs.
- Ready communities: Offer services to enhance the health, safety, economic stability, development and learning of children and families within their cultural context.
- Ready child care and schools: Deliver high-quality, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive care and education that supports families in nurturing their child’s healthy development and learning.
- Ready state with ready systems: Provide equitable access to comprehensive services and resources that support families and children from all backgrounds.



While child care and schools are responsible for delivering high-quality learning experiences, other components of the equation must also provide support and partnership. For example, collaboration between child care, schools and communities increases access to services, provides ongoing opportunities for family engagement, supports coordinated professional development for early educators, and helps to remove systemic barriers that affect children’s experiences. It is essential that all four components work together for the benefit of all children.

The Parent Aware House: A Framework for Learner Success

Parent Aware uses a “house” to represent quality teaching and learning practices that support early learners’ success. These practices are summarized in Parent Aware’s five categories of program standards:

1. Health and Well-being
2. Relationships with Families
3. Teaching and Relationships with Children
4. Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child
5. Professionalism

The overarching goal of these practices is **individualized teaching and learning for every child**. These practices are supported through coaching, training, education and financial support.

The elements are symbolized by parts of a “house”: foundation, door, pillars, siding and roof. Together, they form the structure needed to support children’s success in school and beyond.



The Parent Aware House was adapted from the National Center of Quality Teaching and Learning Framework for Effective Practices and the Washington Early Achiever’s House.

The Foundation: Health and Well-being

Children do better when early care and education programs are safe and healthy, provide nutritious meals and snacks, and offer many opportunities for active play. This foundation allows children to take full advantage of learning opportunities.

The Door: Relationships with Families

Children do better when families are engaged in their children's education and development. Building two-way relationships with families helps strengthen a sense of belonging among all children in the program as they experience respect and support for their home culture and language.

The Left Pillar: Teaching and Relationships with Children

Children do better when early educators are caring and engaging, provide quality learning environments, use a curriculum or learning approach, and support children's transitions to kindergarten. Early educators make a *big difference* in children's lives. These practices help build relationships and give children what they need to learn and grow.

The Right Pillar: Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child

Children do better when their early educators know them well, understand their levels of development, and use this information to plan learning experiences and guide activities. When early educators record children's growth and learning using observation and assessment, it gives them the power to know just the right activities to provide next.

The Siding: Professionalism

Children do better when their early educators have professional preparation that includes higher education coursework that helps early educators earn credentials and degrees, combined with on-going training and support. These qualifications have been found to be consistent predictors of strong child-adult interactions, quality learning environments and positive child outcomes.

Professional preparation is most effective when it:

- Allows for and encourages specialization
- Encourages participants to own their own goals and individualize their learning, making the experience meaningful and relevant to them
- Is flexible and offers choice in content and format

The Roof: The Goal of Individualized Teaching and Learning for Every Child

Children do better when early educators individualize instruction and provide a nurturing and joyful environment. Young children vary widely in their interests, skills, knowledge, cultures, languages and abilities. Instruction needs to meet the needs of all children, regardless of these differences.

Teaching and learning are truly individualized when early educators:

- Adjust their curriculum and activities to meet the interests and needs of the children in their program
- Intentionally plan for the specific learning experiences needed, grounded in their knowledge of each child's development, based on assessment information, and the skills and concepts they know they need to learn
- Make sure children get just the right amount of help to keep on learning

Continuous Quality Improvement Process

Parent Aware encourages child care and early education programs to adopt these practices through a process of continuous quality improvement that includes these steps:

- Assess needs and set goals
- Create an action plan
- Gather information
- Discuss and reflect on progress
- Update the action plan

The purpose of this process is to foster a positive climate of ongoing learning and improvement. The world of early learning is always changing, with new research, new families and children, and at times even new staff and leadership. Commitment to engaging in ongoing reflection and improvement is one marker of a high-quality program and allows early care and education professionals to be responsive to the needs of children and families they serve.

Part Two: Rating Pathways

Pathways to Becoming Rated

How programs receive Ratings varies by program type and pathway. There are four Rating pathways:

- One-Star Rating
- Full Rating
- Accelerated Rating
- Automatic Rating

The Rating pathways provide customized processes that consider the ways child care and early education programs are monitored and held accountable for meeting the Parent Aware standards through other state and national processes, including:

- State licensing requirements with monitoring provided by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Office of Inspector General, Licensing Division
- State prekindergarten statutory requirements with monitoring provided by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Early Learning Services Division
- Head Start Program Performance Standards, with monitoring provided by the national Office of Head Start
- National accreditation standards, with monitoring provided by organizations offering accreditations approved by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families

The rating pathways are provided to save time for child care and early education programs, so that they do not need to document quality for the same standard in two separate processes, and to ensure an efficient use of time for those who review evidence for Ratings.

One-Star Rating

Licensed child care programs receive a One-Star Rating for being licensed, unless they opt out. This Rating recognizes that licensed programs meet many foundational quality practices related to equipment, materials, health and safety.

Eligible program types:

- State and Tribally-licensed family child care
- State and Tribally-licensed child care centers

Requirements

Licensed in good standing. The program is licensed by either the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families, or a Tribal government, and may not have any of the following violations:

- Conditional license
- Temporary immediate suspension
- Suspension
- Revocation
- Decertification
- Subject of a finding of fraud
- Prohibited from receiving public funds
- The subject of suspended, denied or terminated payments

Full Rating

This pathway includes three options for receiving a Rating: Two-Stars, Three-Stars and Four-Stars.

- At Two-Stars, programs demonstrate they are meeting all requirements and indicators for the Two-Star Rating.
- At Three- and Four-Stars, programs earn points toward Stars, providing flexibility and the option to choose the indicators they wish to meet based on their strengths and philosophy.

Eligible program types:

- Licensed family child care centers
- Licensed child care centers

Full-Rating Requirements

Every program seeking a Full Rating must complete requirements outlined in this section to receive a Rating.

- **Meets requirements for One Star**
- **Actively serves children:** Actively serves children ranging in age from birth to kindergarten entry.
- **Individual Develop Membership:** Lead early educators have a current Individual Develop Membership.
- **Ongoing professional learning:** Lead early educators must successfully complete the required number of hours of approved training, coaching, consultation or mentoring every five years for the desired Star Rating in the specific Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) Content Areas, or have a current, age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license.

Lead early educators with a current initial Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential within the last 3 years or an AMI/AMS Montessori diploma within the last 5 years have met all training requirements for all KCF areas. Lead early educators with a current, age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license have met all the training requirements except those with a * below.

Two-Stars	Three- and Four-Stars
Hours by Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Area	Hours by Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Area
<p>8 hours in Content Area I: Child Development and Learning.</p> <p>2 hours in Content Area IIc: Promoting Social and Emotional Development and/or IX: Trauma-Informed Care and Practice. (Training hours can be a combination of KCF areas IIc or IX.)</p> <p>6 hours in Content Area III: Relationships with Families and/or X: Working with Multilingual Children and Families. (Training hours can be a combination of KCF areas III or X.)</p> <p>2* hours in Content Area IV: Assessment, Evaluation, and Individualization</p>	<p>10 hours in Content Area I: Child Development and Learning.</p> <p>10 hours in Content Area II: Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences.</p> <p>10 hours in Content Area IIc: Promoting Social and Emotional Development and/or IX: Trauma-Informed Care and Practice. (Training hours can be a combination of KCF areas IIc or IX.)</p> <p>10 hours in Content Area III: Relationships with Families and/or X: Working with Multilingual Children and Families. (Training hours can be a combination of KCF areas III or X.)</p> <p>10* hours in Content Area IV: Assessment, Evaluation, and Individualization.</p>

What are the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Areas?

The Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Areas are categories of the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Framework, which is a set of standards or expectations regarding what people educating and caring for young children in Minnesota need to know and be able to do.

Scoring for the Full Ratings

From July 1, 2026, through July 1, 2028, Parent Aware will be transitioning to a new scoring rubric.

Current Scoring for Three- and Four-Stars

Programs must score at least 2 points in every category.

Program type	Three-Stars	Four-Stars
Family child care	25-34 points	35-50 points
Child care centers	33-48 points	49-65 points

Scoring Starting July 1, 2028

Programs must score at least 2 points in every category.

Program type	Three-Stars	Four-Stars
Family child care	25-34 points	35-51 points
Child care centers	35-44 points	45-61 points

Accelerated

This pathway includes one level: Four-Stars. Programs applying for this level must meet the requirements and indicators for the Accelerated Rating.

Programs eligible for the Accelerated Rating:

- Licensed, accredited family child care programs
- Licensed, accredited child care centers
- Prekindergarten programs in public schools that receive School Readiness funding

Accelerated Rating Requirements

- **Actively serves children:** Actively serves children ranging in age from birth to kindergarten entry.
- **Individual Develop Membership:** Lead early educators have a current Individual Develop Membership.
- **Ongoing professional learning:** Lead early educators successfully completed the following hours of approved training, coaching, consultation or mentoring every five years in the specific Knowledge and Competency Framework (KCF) Content Areas, or have a current, age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license.

Lead early educators with a current initial Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential within the last 3 years or an AMI/AMS Montessori diploma within the last 5 years have met all training requirements for all KCF areas. Lead early educators with a current, age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license have met all the training requirements except those with a * below.

- 10 hours in Content Area II: Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences.
- 10 hours in Content Area IV: Assessment, Evaluation, and Individualization

Automatic Pathway

This pathway includes one level: Four-Stars. There are no indicators for this pathway because eligible programs meet all the Parent Aware Standards through state or national requirements.

Programs eligible for the Automatic Pathway:

- Prekindergarten programs in public schools that receive Voluntary Prekindergarten funding
- Head Start center-based programs and their child care partners
- Early Head Start center-based programs and their child care partners

How Programs Eligible for Accelerated and Automatic Pathways Meet Parent Aware Standards

Child care and early education programs that are eligible for the Accelerated and Automatic Rating Pathways are monitored and held accountable for meeting the Parent Aware standards through other state and national processes. See Section Four of the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators for additional background on the requirements these program types meet that closely align with the Parent Aware standards.

Part Three: Standards and Indicators

An Overview

Quality care and education can look different across settings to meet the unique needs of children and families. These settings or types of programs can be public or private, in a home or a center, use a wide array of educational philosophies, and use materials and resources in unique and creative ways.

While Parent Aware provides a common set of Standards for child care and early education programs, these best practices are not a checklist or a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Rather, they provide a flexible framework that encourages innovation, creativity and continuous quality improvement. There is also flexibility in how each program type shows that they are meeting the standards.

Standards and Indicators

The Parent Aware Standards apply to all programs despite what pathway they take for Rating.

The information in this section is organized by Categories, Standards and Indicators by Star-Level.

- **Category** is a broad category of quality.
- **Standard** is a feature of early care and education programs that, based on research, has been shown to make a difference for children.
- **Indicator** is a condition that can be observed or measured and used to show that a standard has been met.
- **Why is this standard important?** This provides background about what the practice means, and why, based on research, this practice is important for children’s success in school and beyond.

Category: Teaching and Relationships Standards

T.1. Curriculum. Programs plan and implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences using a curriculum or bundle of curricula that cover all the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIP) child development domains.

Why is this standard important? A curriculum is a roadmap for planning and implementing a program, which includes learning objectives for children, as well as the experiences and materials provided by the program to help children achieve them. Alignment of the curriculum to the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIP) helps ensure that all children across age groups and settings receive developmentally appropriate instruction. Curricula are more likely to support skill-building if they are research-based. (Alliance for Early Success, 2013; Davis Schoch, 2023; Early Achiever’s, 2013; NAEYC, 2009; National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007; NCQTI, 2014; Reynolds, 2016.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	<p>T1.1. Routines. Uses consistent routines to support children.</p> <p>T1.2. Lesson plans. Uses lesson plans aligned with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIP) domains.</p>
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>T1.3a. Curriculum use. Uses a curriculum aligned with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIP) domains across all age groups. (Required for Three-Stars or higher.)</p> <p>T1.3b. Classroom transitions. Keeps classroom transitions brief and uses them to extend learning experiences.</p> <p>This indicator applies to child care centers only.</p> <p>The CLASS® observation that is completed for Indicator T2.3 will be used to determine if this Indicator is met.</p>
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	<p>T1.3a. Curriculum use. Uses a curriculum aligned with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIP) domains across all age groups. (Required for Three-Stars or higher.)</p>

T.2. Play and interactions. The program implements learning experiences that provide purposeful play, peer and adult interaction, exploration, and skill development.

Why is this standard important? Children learn more in early learning settings with early educators who thoughtfully plan for the use of different types of play to help children learn skills they will need in school and beyond. Early educators also use exploration to extend children’s learning and problem-solving abilities and build conversational skills. The emotional climate and classroom organization play a role in establishing a learning environment where skill development happens. (Burchinal, 2011; Davis Schoch, 2023; Heidemann, 2010; Mashburn, 2008; NCQTL, 2012; NCQTL, 2014.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	No indicators.
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>T2.3. Child-adult interactions. This indicator applies to child care centers only. Provides instruction that is organized, challenging and warm. Preschool and preschool/toddler classrooms that apply for Three-Stars or higher in child care centers are observed using the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS).</p> <p>From July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2028, Parent Aware is transitioning to a new way of assigning points for this indicator.</p> <p>Current:</p> <p>The following points are awarded for being observed using the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 points <p>Starting July 1, 2028:</p> <p>The following points are awarded for setting goals to improve CLASS scores, for receiving coaching to work toward the goals, and receiving an on-site CLASS observation in one-third to one-half the program classrooms that serve preschool children. Goals must include at least one related to working toward a score of 2.5 in the Instructional Support Domain or higher.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All lead teachers working in preschool or preschool/toddler classrooms received between 1 and 5 hours of CLASS coaching in the past two years = 5 points • All lead teachers working in preschool and preschool/toddler classrooms received more than 5 hours of CLASS coaching in the past two years = 10 points
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

T.3. Learning and belonging. The program creates an environment that supports a sense of belonging for each child and family.

Why is this standard important? The learning environment sets the stage for everything else that happens in early care and education programs. The best environments have engaging materials and equipment, are welcoming to families, provide for the safety and comfort of all who use it, and are affirming and respectful of the children’s cultures, abilities, and languages. High quality environments empower early educators to offer the kind of early educational experiences that set children up for success in school and beyond. (Burchinal et al., 2011; Halgunseth, 2009; York, 2003.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	T3.2. Learning environment. Evaluates the learning environment and sets goals using the Parent Aware Environment Self-Assessment (ESA) Checklist.
Three- or Four-Stars	T3.3. Cultural responsiveness. Evaluates cultural responsiveness and sets goals using an approved self-assessment tool. (2 points)
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

T.4. Kindergarten transition support. The program supports children and families as children transition to kindergarten.

Why is this standard important? The transition to kindergarten is one that needs a comprehensive approach as described through the Successful Learner Equation. The transition to kindergarten is an exciting and sensitive time for children and their families and each experience the change differently. It is important for child care and schools to thoughtfully implement transition practices that engage families and are flexible and innovative to meet the needs of each child. (Alliance for Early Success, 2013; Hayakawa, 2014; Head Start ECLKC, 2015; NAEYC, 2013; National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007; Office of Head Start, 2019; Passe, 2010; Reynolds, 2016; Reynolds, Magnuson & Ou, 2010.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	T4.2. Kindergarten transition plan. Provides written guidance to families for planning their child’s kindergarten transition.
Three- or Four-Stars	T4.3. Kindergarten transition activities. Offers a variety of activities that transition children to kindergarten. (4 points)
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

Category: Relationships with Families Standards

R.1. Respect and ongoing two-way communication. The program respects each family’s strengths, choices and goals for their children. Information about children’s progress and curriculum is shared between the program and the family.

Why is this standard important? Effective early learning programs form relationships with families that foster respect, support and collaboration. Developing partnerships with families that include on-going two-way communication allow early educators to learn about the child’s interests and routines; family traditions, religion, language, and expectations; gather information that can be used to create a program sensitive to the child’s culture; and provide a curriculum that meets the child’s individual needs. Strong relationships with families are associated with positive child and parent outcomes and more sensitive caregiving. (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2007; Hayakawa, 2013; Miedel, 2000; NAEYC, 2009; Office of Head Start, 2011; Porter, 2011.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	<p>R1.1. Asks and listens to families. Has conversations to learn about each child and their family’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Routines » Ways they prefer to communicate with the program » Backgrounds and interests » Languages spoken in the home » Cultures that family members consider most important to their identities <p>R1.2. Shares information with families. Shares information in a way that meets the needs of all families, including those who speak languages other than English.</p>
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>R1.3a. Family involvement. Offers a variety of activities, based on families’ interests, with at least one focused on helping families extend children’s learning at home. (2 points)</p> <p>R1.3b. Family input. Offers families opportunities to provide input into decisions that impact the program. (2 points)</p>
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

R.2. Links families to services. The program provides families with links to services based on the family’s strengths, resources, priorities and concerns.

Why is this standard important? Early educators in early care and education programs see families regularly and know the families well. Research has shown that when early care and education programs connect families to services in their community, there are far-reaching, positive outcomes for children and families. (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2007; NAECY, 2013; Office of Head Start, 2011.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	<p>R1.2. Shares information with families. Shares information in a way that meets the needs of all families, including those who speak languages other than English.</p> <p>R2.1 Family support services. Provides families with the list of community services available on the Parent Aware website.</p>
Three- or Four-Stars	No indicators.
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

Category: Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child Standards

A.1. Observation and assessment. The program learns more about each child through regular observation and formal assessment.

Why is this standard important? Offering individualized instruction requires knowing and understanding children’s unique needs, temperaments and levels of development. Gathering assessment information is one important part of getting to know children and helps early educators monitor their progress. Assessment information best informs instruction when it is gathered using a valid, reliable child assessment tool and involves families. (NAEYC, 2009; NCQTI, 2014; Reynolds, 2016; Tout et al, 2011.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	<p>A1.1. Child observation. Observes and documents children’s growth and development.</p>
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>A1.3a. Child assessment. Assesses all children in at least one age group using an approved assessment tool at least once a year. (Required for Three-Stars)</p> <p>A1.4. Child assessment. Assesses all children in all age groups using an approved assessment tool at least twice a year. (Required for Four-Stars)</p> <p>A1.3b. Providing assessment to families. Provides families with child assessment results. (2 points)</p> <p>A1.3c. Asks for parent input. Asks families to share their own observations from home and provide input into goals. (2 points)</p> <p>A1.3d. Kindergarten Entry Profile tool. Assesses each child using a child assessment tool included in the Kindergarten Entry Profile menu. (3 points)</p> <p>A1.3e. Planning for children with special needs. Has a plan to partner with families and service providers of children with special needs. (2 points)</p>
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	<p>A1.4. Child assessment. Assesses all children in all age groups using an approved assessment tool at least twice a year. (Required for Four-Stars)</p>

A.2. Assessment-based instruction. The program uses assessments to plan group and individualized instruction.

Why is this standard important? It is not enough to gather assessment information; it must also be put to use to make a difference for children. When assessment information is aggregated and well-understood by early educators, they are able to use the information to inform instructional planning, enabling them to meet the needs of each child while also planning for the needs of the group. (NAEYC, 2003.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	No indicators.
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>A2.3a. Assessment-based individualized instruction. Uses child assessment information to design goals and guide instruction for each child. (2 points)</p> <p>A2.3b. Assessment-based group instruction. Uses aggregated child assessment information to design group goals and guide instruction for the group. (2 points)</p>
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

Category: Professionalism Standards

P.1. Program leadership. Program leaders have specialized knowledge and skills to effectively lead an early care and education program.

Why is this standard important? Organizational leadership and support are needed to carry out individualized instruction for young children. When directors, lead providers and education coordinators have training and education credentials specific to leadership in early childhood settings, they are better prepared to foster a climate of on-going growth and learning. (Jorde Bloom, Jackson, Talan & Kelton, 2013; Klein & Knitzer, 2007.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	P1.1. Professional ethics. Commits to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct.
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>P1.3a. Specialized credential. Program director or lead provider earned a credential for leading and managing an early care and education program. (3 points)</p> <p>P1.3b. Education for leadership. Program director, lead provider or education coordinator has a four-year degree or higher with at least 24 early childhood-related, verified semester credits. (3 points)</p> <p>P1.3c. Program development. Creates and uses a program-wide professional development plan. (3 points)</p>
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

P.2. Qualifications and development. Lead early educators pursue and document educational achievements.

Why is this standard important? Adults are best able to learn new skills when professional development scaffolds to meet their individual learning needs. Professional development plans that respond to each learner’s personal and professional background and include coaching, consultation, and mentoring, in addition to classroom-based training, improve early educators’ ability to put knowledge into practice. (Bowman et al, 2001; Davis Schoch, 2023; De Alba-Johnson, 2004; Hawley, 2013; IOM & NRC, 2012; Jacobs, 2001; NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011; Passe Sancho, 2015; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Yoshikawa et al., 2013; Zaslow et al., 2010.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	P2.2. Intentional ongoing learning. Each lead provider or lead teacher creates and uses an individual professional development plan.
Three- or Four-Stars	<p>P2.3a. Career Lattice achievements. Recognizes the Career Lattice Steps achieved by lead early educators. Points are awarded based on lead early educators’ Steps on the Minnesota Career Lattice, with one point for Foundational Awareness and Step 1, 2 points for Step 2, and so on through 12 points for Step 12. For centers, the scores are averaged. For family child care, points are awarded for the one lead provider. See the Minnesota Career Lattice Steps on the next page for more information.</p> <p>P2.3b. Highly qualified. All lead providers or lead teachers have at least one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Associate’s degree related to Early Childhood Education/MN Career Lattice Step 9B, 9C or 9D » Bachelor’s degree related to Early Childhood Education/MN Career Lattice Step 10B, 10C or 10D » Master’s degree related to Early Childhood Education/MN Career Lattice Step 11B, 11C or 11D » Doctorate degree related to Early Childhood Education/MN Career Lattice Step 12B, 12C or 12D » Current age-appropriate Minnesota teaching license (2 points)
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

Minnesota Career Lattice Steps

Average Points: Centers	Points Earned for P2.3a	Steps: Family Child Care
1.99 or fewer	1 point	Foundational Awareness – Step 1
Between 2.00 and 2.99	3 points	Step 2
Between 3.00 and 3.99	4 points	Step 3
Between 4.00 and 4.99	5 points	Step 4
Between 5.00 and 5.99	6 points	Step 5
Between 6.00 and 7.99	7 points	Step 6 and 7
Between 8.00 and 9.99	8 points	Step 8 and 9
Between 10.00 and 10.99	9 points	Step 10
11.00 or higher	10 points	Step 11

Category: Health and Well-being Standards

H.1. Health and safety. The program establishes and maintains an environment that ensures each child’s health and safety.

Why is this standard important? Ensuring compliance with licensing regulations is a critical first step in building a quality care and education program. When programs carefully monitor health and safety using licensing regulations and other practices provided in self-assessment tools, they are able to build the foundational level of quality needed to successfully carry out the best practices included in Parent Aware. (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O’Brien, & McCartney, 2002; Helburn, 1995; Kontos, Howes, Shinn & Galinsky, 1995; National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education, 2011.)

Star Rating	Indicators for Full-Rating
Two-Stars	H1.2. Health and safety practices. Evaluates health and safety practices using the Parent Aware Environment Self-Assessment Checklist and develops goals in areas of need.
Three- or Four-Stars	No indicators.
Star Rating	Indicators for Accelerated Rating
Four-Stars	Meets standard through other monitoring processes.

H.2. Nutrition and play. The program provides healthy meals and snacks that encourage healthy eating behaviors and offers daily opportunities for active play.

Why is this standard important? Eating nutritious foods improves children’s ability to grow, develop, and achieve and maintain a healthy weight. It helps children get the nutrients their bodies need to stay healthy, active and strong.

Children are physical learners and require physical movement to develop appropriately. Early learning programs that provide structured and unstructured physical activity will be more likely to keep children engaged and learning and can help prevent childhood obesity. (Ammerman, 2007; Head Start, 2016; Korenman, Abner, Kaestner & Gordon, 2013.)

Star Rating		Indicators for Full-Rating	
Two-Stars		No indicators.	
Three- or Four-Stars		<p>H2.3a. Healthy food. Offers healthy meals and snacks. (2 points)</p> <p>H2.3b. Sharing information about healthy food. Provides families with written guidelines on importance of providing healthy meals and snacks. (2 points)</p> <p>H2.3c. Nutrition and active play. Evaluates nutrition and physical activity practices using a self-assessment tool and develops goals in areas of need. (3 points)</p>	
Star Rating		Indicators for Accelerated Rating	
Four-Stars		Meets standard through other monitoring processes.	

Part Four: State and Federal Requirements for Programs Eligible for the Accelerated and Automatic Pathways

Child care and early education programs that are eligible for the Accelerated and Automatic Rating Pathways are monitored and held accountable for meeting the Parent Aware standards through other state and national processes.

The customized pathways are not an exception to quality standards; they are a recognition of equivalent rigor. Head Start and public school prekindergarten programs are mandated by state and federal law to meet or exceed Parent Aware requirements. Their Four-Star Ratings are verified through ongoing oversight by the U.S. Office of Head Start or the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Accredited child care programs are monitored by organizations that offer approved accreditation processes. These monitoring processes ensure the same high bar for child outcomes is met without duplicating administrative work.

This section provides background on the requirements these program types meet that closely align with the Parent Aware standards.

Prekindergarten Programs in Public Schools

Early education programs that receive state funding through the Voluntary Prekindergarten program meet the Parent Aware Standards for Four-Star Rated programs through program requirements in [Minnesota Statutes 142D.08](#). Public school prekindergarten programs receiving School Readiness funds meet the Parent Aware standards through program requirements in [Minnesota Statutes 142D.05](#). These programs are monitored by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

The following background is provided to show the alignment of state requirements for these program types to the Parent Aware Standards.

In the summary below, items that only pertain to programs funded through the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program have a * after them.

Program requirements. Public school prekindergarten programs meet program requirements to receive a Four-Star Rating by doing the following:

- Reporting to the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families about how school districts meet statutory requirements
- Collecting child entry and exit assessment data
- Submitting entry and exit assessment data*
- Completing annual reporting requirements
- Working toward goals in the Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness plan, and reporting results to the Minnesota Department of Education
- For prekindergarten programs receiving School Readiness funding: Meeting the Indicators for the Accelerated Rating

Teaching and Relationships requirements

- **Curriculum use.** Uses a curriculum aligned with ECIP domains.
 - Submit information about the program’s curriculum to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and the training received on the curriculum.
 - Provide comprehensive program content aligned with the state early learning standards, including the implementation of curriculum, assessment, and intentional instructional strategies that support transition to kindergarten through grade 3 academic standards.
 - Provide instruction to foster children's social and emotional development, cognitive development, physical and motor development, and language and literacy skills.
 - Provide instructional content and activities that are of sufficient length and intensity to address learning needs including offering a program with at least 350 hours of instruction per school year for a prekindergarten student.*
- **Child-adult interactions.** Early educators receive professional development, training and coaching informed by a measure of child-adult interactions, using one of the following: the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System (CLASS), Danielson Framework, Marzano Framework, TPOT or a self-designed assessment as approved by the school district.*
- **Kindergarten transition and alignment.**
 - Coordinate appropriate kindergarten transition with families, community-based organizations and school district kindergarten programs.
 - Implement strategies that support the alignment of professional development, instruction, assessments and prekindergarten through grade 3 curricula.*

Relationships with Families requirements

- **Family involvement.** Involves parents in program decision-making.
 - Involve parents in program decision-making and transition planning by implementing parent engagement strategies.
 - Strategies must include culturally and linguistically responsive activities in prekindergarten through third grade that are aligned with early childhood family education under section [MN Statutes 142D.10](#).*
- **Family support services.** Coordinate with community-based and school district services.
 - Coordinate with relevant community-based services.
 - Services must include health and social service agencies, to ensure children have access to comprehensive services.*
 - Cooperate with adult basic education programs and other adult literacy programs.
 - Services must include early childhood special education, homeless students and English learners.*

Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child requirements

- **Child assessment.** Assess each child's cognitive and language skills with a comprehensive child assessment instrument when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program to improve program planning and implementation, communicate with parents, and promote kindergarten readiness.

- Submit assessment data when a child enters and again before the child leaves the program, using a commissioner-approved formative, developmentally appropriate assessment and report results and demographic data to the department in a form and manner prescribed by the commissioner.*

Professionalism requirements

- **Ongoing professional learning.**
 - Have early educators knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language programs, and instruction, and licensed according to section [122A.261](#).
 - Educators are licensed through the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) or are working toward receiving licensure by 2028. All early educators with teaching licenses have degrees related to Early Care and Education from accredited institutions of higher education and complete 125 hours of training every five years in these topics:
 - Positive behavior intervention
 - Reading preparation
 - Meeting the needs of English language learners
 - Cultural competency
 - Accommodation, modification, and adaptation of curriculum, materials, and instruction
 - Warning signs of early onset mental illness, including at least one hour of suicide prevention
 - American Indian history and culture

Health and Well-being requirements

- **Health and safety.** Public schools follow health and safety requirements in the Child and Adult Food Program and school district health-related policies. They also have nurses available on-site.
- **Ratios.** Ensure staff-to-child ratios of 1-to-10 and a maximum group size of 20 children.

Head Start Programs and Their Child Care Partners

Early education programs that receive federal Head Start funding are monitored by the U.S. Administration of Children and Families, Office of Head Start, to ensure compliance with Head Start Program Performance Standards. The following background is provided to show the alignment of federal Head Start Performance Standards to the Parent Aware Standards. There are additional Head Start Performance Standards; for the full list of requirements see [1302.102](#), Program Goals, continuous improvement, and reporting.

Program requirements. Head Start Programs meet program requirements to receive a Four-Star Rating by doing the following:

- Participating in all parts of the federal Head Start monitoring process
- Measuring impacts, including tracking and reporting child assessment results

Teaching and Relationships requirements

- **Curricula.** Center-based and family child care Head Start programs must implement developmentally appropriate, research-based early childhood curricula. [1302.32](#)
- **Effective teaching practices.** Teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive practices, interactions, and environments that foster trust and emotional security; are communication and language rich; promote critical thinking and problem-solving; social, emotional, behavioral, and language development; provide supportive feedback for learning; motivate continued effort; and support all children’s engagement in learning experiences and activities. [1302.31](#)
- **Teaching and the learning environment.** Ensure educators and other relevant staff provide responsive care, effective teaching, and an organized learning environment that promotes healthy development and children’s skill growth aligned with [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five](#), including for children with disabilities.

Relationships with Families requirements

- **Family engagement.** A program must integrate parent and family engagement strategies into all systems and program services to support family well-being and promote children’s learning and development. [1302.34](#)
- **Community partnerships and coordination.** A program must establish ongoing collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations such as establishing joint agreements, procedures, or contracts and arranging for onsite delivery of services as appropriate, to facilitate access to community services that are responsive to children’s and families’ needs and family partnership goals, and community needs and resources, as determined by the community assessment. [1302.53](#)

Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child requirements

- **Assessment for individualization.** Must conduct standardized and structured assessments, which may be observation-based or direct, for each child that provide ongoing information to evaluate the child’s developmental level and progress in outcomes aligned to the goals described in the [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five](#). [1302.33 \(b\)](#)

Professionalism requirements

- **Staff qualifications and competency requirements.** Early Head Start center-based educator qualification requirements. [1302.91](#)
- As prescribed in section [645A\(h\)](#) of the Act, a program must ensure center-based educators that provide direct services to infants and toddlers in Early Head Start centers have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or comparable credential, and have been trained or have equivalent coursework in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.
- The Secretary must ensure no less than 50% of all Head Start early educators, nationwide, have a baccalaureate degree in child development, early childhood education or equivalent coursework.
- As prescribed in section [648A\(a\)\(3\)\(B\)](#) of the Act, a program must ensure all center-based early educators have at least an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in child development or early childhood education, equivalent coursework, or otherwise meet the requirements of section [648A\(a\)\(3\)\(B\)](#) of the Act.

Health and Well-being requirements

- **Health program services.** Provide high-quality health, oral health, mental health, and nutrition services that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and that will support each child's growth and school readiness. [1302 Subpart D-Health and Mental Health Program Services](#)
- **Ratios.** With certain exceptions, classrooms where the majority of children are:
 - 4 – 5 years: no more than 20 children.
 - 3 years: no more than 17 children.
 - Under 3 years, no more than 8 or 9 children.
 - For full details, see: [1302.31](#).

Accredited Child Care Programs

Accredited child care programs that apply to receive a Four-Star Rating through the Accelerated Pathway are monitored by the organization that provides their chosen accreditation. Accreditations are reviewed by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to ensure they include standards in the following areas.

For full details, see Minnesota Statutes [142E.17, Subd. 4](#).

Program requirements. Accredited Child Care Programs meet program requirements to receive a Four-Star Rating by:

- Achieving accreditation from a nationally recognized accreditation approved by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families
- Meeting the Indicators for the Accelerated Rating

Teaching and Relationships requirements

- Age-appropriate learning activities
 - At least one standard related to use of a written curriculum
- Positive interactions between adults and children
- Learning environment that supports developmentally appropriate experiences for children
- Support children who are linguistically and culturally diverse

Relationships with Families requirements

- Family engagement strategies

Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child requirements

- A system of tracking children's learning
 - At least one standard related to using a formal assessment process
- Use of assessment to meet children's needs
- Support children who have developmental or special health care needs

Professionalism Indicators

- Specific qualifications for staff

Health and Well-being requirements

- Health and safety requirements

See the ParentAware.org website for the [list of approved accreditations](#).

The National Association for Family Child Care accreditation is designated in Minnesota Statutes 142E.17, Subd. 4, as an approved accreditation.

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