DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Parent Aware Redesign:

Parent Aware Standards and Indicators 2023 Engagement Summary

Child Care Services Division

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I. Introduction

Parent Aware is Minnesota's quality rating and improvement system for child care and early education programs [Minn. Stat. 124D.142]. Parent Aware offers tools and resources to help families find quality child care and early education programs, and to help child care programs improve their practices. More information about Parent Aware is provided on the ParentAware.org website.

In 2021, the Minnesota Department of Human Services engaged in efforts to better understand and address inequities within Parent Aware. As part of this effort, the department collaborated with Parent Aware partners through the Parent Aware Racial Equity Action Plan workgroup, and engaged with hundreds of child care programs across the state to identify and report on barriers and to create a plan for improvement. For more information about this process, see the Addressing Parent Aware Inequities webpage.

In order to implement the recommendations in the plan for improvement, the department launched the Parent Aware Redesign in 2023. This multi-year effort includes multiple projects and centers best practices and racial, cultural, linguistic, ability and geographic equity. One of the projects in the Parent Aware Redesign focuses on updating the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators. See the Minnesota Department of Human Services website for more information about the Parent Aware Redesign.

The Parent Aware Standards and Indicators are the quality measures used to award Star Ratings. These Standards and Indicators were last updated in 2016. The project will review and update the Standards and Indicators to reflect best practices, ensure they promote child well-being, are culturally and linguistically affirming, and are meaningful for programs that participate. This project includes many opportunities for broad and diverse input from those who have worked with or in Parent Aware and may have experienced barriers in doing so. More information is provided on the department's website about the project to revise the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators.

This report summarizes the first round of engagement to inform updates to the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators, including:

- Engagement process used to gather feedback on the Parent Aware definition of quality, and
- Responses provided to the questions asked in the engagement process.

The information gathered through this engagement process will be used to inform the project to revise to the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators, planned for roll out in 2026.

II. Engagement Process

Background

The department conducted an engagement through a survey tool to gather feedback about how Parent Aware defines quality as a part of the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators project. This is the first of two rounds of engagement.

An evaluation of Parent Aware is also underway. Feedback provided from the engagement processes, combined with information from the evaluation, will inform updates to the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators, and other aspects of Parent Aware.

Survey Design

The survey was written by Minnesota Department of Human Services Child Development Services unit staff with support from consultant partners at Portage Partners Consulting LLC. A combination of rating and open-ended questions were created to allow for exploration of themes, in the respondents' own words. An initial draft of the survey was tested with a small group of internal and external partners before being distributed to the intended recipients.

The survey asked respondents to share feedback regarding their definition of quality in child care and early education programs. Information was provided via video, along with a written description of the current definition of quality used for Parent Aware. The written description described the Parent Aware "House Framework" (see Appendix B) and the goal of Parent Aware, as it is currently stated.

Survey Participants

Parent Aware Ambassadors were asked to participate in the survey. Details about the Ambassador selection process are included below.

Parent Aware Ambassadors

At the end of May 2023, an invitation was broadly distributed to individuals working in the Child Care Aware system, Child Development Services unit grantees, child care and early education providers and community groups inviting them to sign up as an Ambassador to help advise and share information on the Parent Aware Redesign. By signing up, individuals could offer their input routinely in the Redesign process/projects and receive monthly updates about the Parent Aware Redesign projects and future feedback opportunities. A total of 292 individuals signed up to be Ambassadors. Detailed demographic and experience information was collected about each Ambassador.

Ambassadors included:
- Center, family, Head Start and public prekindergarten child care providers and early educators
- Child Care Aware system staff including coordinators, grant administrators, Parent Aware Quality Coaches and professional development advisors

- Other Child Development Services grantees that support child care providers
- Child care and early education advocates and community partners

All Ambassadors were invited to provide input using the survey in the August and September Ambassador email communications. Any Ambassador who indicated that they had a group they met with regularly was sent a follow up email inviting them to participate in the group version of the survey.

A subgroup of Ambassadors were offered stipends of $25 per hour to ensure a diversity of perspectives across race, ethnicity, language, role, geography and experience.

Survey Promotion

Individual Survey

The individual survey link was included in monthly Ambassador newsletters that were distributed to all Parent Aware Redesign Ambassadors in Aug. and Sept. 2023. Ambassadors received three additional emails with reminders to complete the survey. Ambassadors who were selected to receive stipends were sent individualized emails to encourage their participation.

Group Sessions

The Parent Aware Ambassador Sign Up Form asked Ambassadors to indicate if they meet with a group regularly with whom they could share updates and gather feedback. Ambassadors who listed a group were emailed an invitation to participate in the engagement process as a group leader. They were invited to an information session and were provided a facilitation guide and group survey link. The facilitation guide included written and video instructions. Group leaders received an email address to send their questions, and to RSVP for debrief sessions. Debrief sessions were held Oct. 10, and were organized by Ambassador type. In the debrief sessions, department staff shared initial themes found in the survey responses. Group leaders shared how the information shared resonated with what they heard during their group sessions.

Debrief attendees included:
- 23 child care and early childhood advocate and partner attendees
- 2 child care center attendees
- 4 family child care attendees
- 2 Head Start attendees

Survey Analysis Methods

The survey data collection was completed using the survey tool in Google Docs. Open-ended comments were coded using an "open coding" system by department staff. Altogether, 734 individual and group open-ended responses were coded. Respondents frequently offered more than one thought in each response. Department staff reviewed all responses and assigned themes.

Open-ended questions:

1. The first asked respondents to share their definition of "quality" child care and early education by asking what they would recommend a close friend look for in a child care and early education program.
2. The second asked for feedback on the "Parent Aware House Framework," which describes the current categories of quality in Parent Aware.
3. The third asked for feedback on the goal of Parent Aware, "Individualized Teaching and Learning."
4. The fourth asked if respondents could change one thing about Parent Aware, what it would be and why.
5. The last asked respondents to provide any other feedback about Parent Aware they wanted to share.

III. Demographics

Demographic information was provided by 266 respondents through the individual and group surveys. Because the surveys were anonymous, it is unknown if some respondents participated in the survey more than once.

Most individual survey respondents (122 or 77.2%) identified their race as "white," while 19 (12%) of respondents identified a race other than "white", and 23 (14.6%) selected "Prefer not to answer". Additionally, 157 (99.4%) of individual survey respondents report that they use English regularly. Eight (5.1%) respondents use Spanish regularly. Nine (5.7%) respondents identified a language other than English or Spanish that they use regularly. Ethnicity and geographic location demographics are outlined in the figures below.

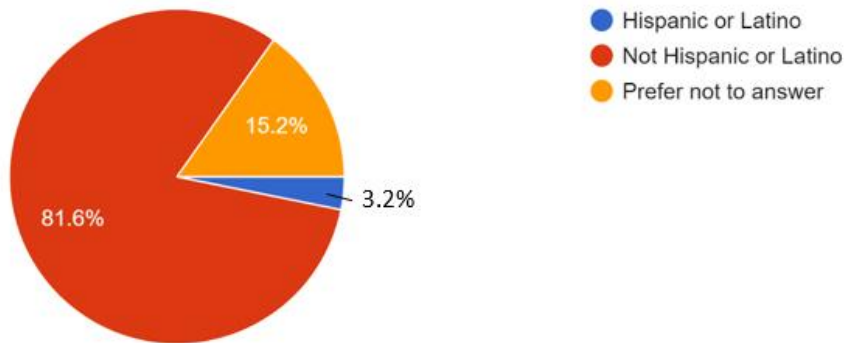**Figure 1. Individual Survey Demographics - Ethnicity**

Figure 1 indicates that 81.6% of individual survey respondents identified their ethnicity as "Not Hispanic or Latino," 3.2% identified as "Hispanic or Latino" and 15.2% selected "Prefer not to answer".

Figure 2. Individual Survey Demographics - Geographic Location

The geographic location that best describes where I live and work is: (choose one)
158 responses

Legend:
- Twin Cities Metro Area
- Tribal nation
- Greater Minnesota, Northwest
- Greater Minnesota, Northeast
- Greater Minnesota, Central
- Greater Minnesota, Southwest
- Great Minnesota, Southeast

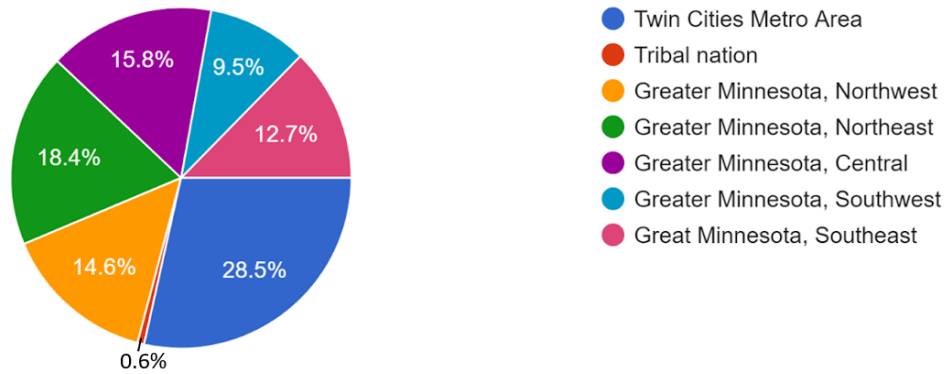Values shown: 15.8%, 9.5%, 12.7%, 18.4%, 28.5%, 14.6%, 0.6%

Figure 2 indicates that the highest percentage of respondents live and work in the Twin Cities Metro Area (28.5%), followed by Greater Minnesota, Northeast (18.4%). All geographic locations were represented by at least one respondent.

Group Survey

Demographic information was provided by 266 respondents through the individual and group surveys. Because the surveys were anonymous, it is unknown if some respondents participated in the survey more than once.

Most group survey participants (78 or 76.5%) identified their race as "white," while 22 (21.2%) of participants identified a race other than "white", and 5 (4.96%) selected "Prefer not to answer." Additionally, 98% of group survey participants use English regularly and 13 (12.7%) of participants identified a language other than English that they use regularly. Ethnicity and geographic demographics are outlined in the figures below.

Figure 3: Group Survey Demographics - Ethnicity
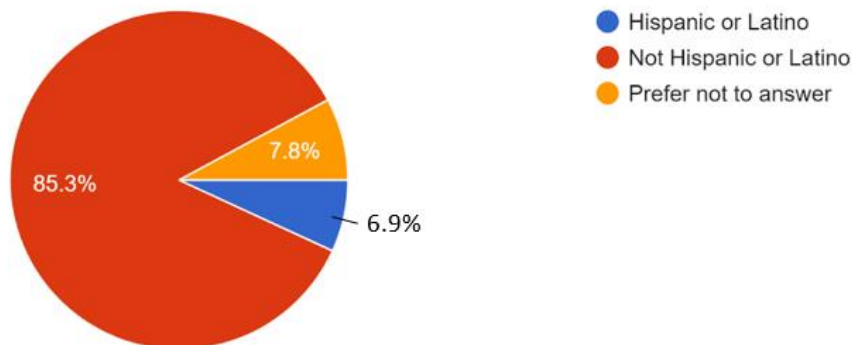
My ethnicity is: (choose one)
102 responses

Legend:
- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino
- Prefer not to answer

Values shown: 85.3%, 7.8%, 6.9%

Figure 3 indicates that 85.3% of group survey respondents identified their ethnicity as "Not Hispanic or Latino," 6.9% identified as "Hispanic or Latino" and 7.8% selected "Prefer not to answer".

Figure 4: Group Survey Demographics - Geographic Location

The geographic location that best describes where I live and work is: (choose one)
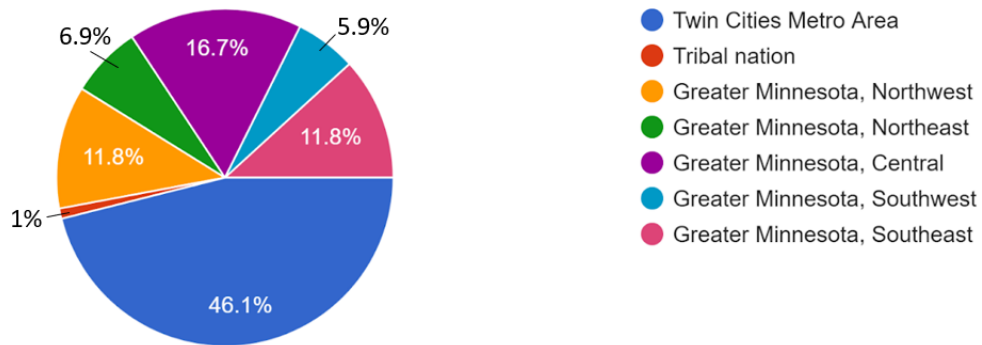102 responses

Figure 4 indicates that the highest percentage of group survey participants live and work in the Twin Cities Metro Area (46.1%), followed by Greater Minnesota, Central (16.7%). All geographic locations were represented by at least one participant.

IV. Survey Results

Question One

Question: A close friend is looking for early care and education for their children, ages 1 and 3. They say they want a "high quality program" and ask you what they should look for that would tell them a program is high quality. What do you tell them to look for?

Response themes:

- **Adult-child interactions:** Respondents said they would look for engaged teachers, positive interactions, gentle discipline, and open-ended conversations with children.
    - "I'd look for a program that is paying attention to social emotional skills in children."
    - "Interactions between providers and children are warm and positive."
    - "I would tell the friend to ask what behavior guidance is for children; a behavior plan that is not shaming or punishing."
- **Alignment with family values**
    - "Look for a [program] mission that aligns with your values and high standards."
- **Clean and safe:** Respondents said they would look for a healthy child care and early education environment, with no licensing violations.
    - "The provider has safety policies in place and is up to date with training."

- o "A safe environment and neighborhood."
- o "I would encourage questions, even if tough. Like, 'Can I see the space the child is sleeping in?'"
- **Curriculum and/or assessment use:** Curriculum use included things like lesson plans or Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). Assessment use included using specific tools, observing children, and tracking learning.
  - o "When we talk about curriculum, it is fully researched and implemented, and we assure staff are trained and qualified."
  - o "Visible lesson plans that include the ECIPS."
  - o "Is there trauma-informed training in the program?"
- **Developmentally appropriate**
  - o "Programs that are inclusive and strive to meet the individual developmental needs of children."
- **Learning:** This theme, broader than "curriculum," includes things like ample materials present and activities that are both child-led and teacher-led.
  - o "I would ask questions about intentional learning."
  - o "Learning opportunities are developmentally appropriate, interactive and plentiful."
- **Parent engagement:** This theme included concepts like communications, open relationships, positive interactions with parents, and asking providers for references.
  - o "I'd want the parent to look for programs that communicate with families and offer resources and events not just for the children, but for parents too."
  - o "Programs that take collaboration seriously with families; programs that are inclusive and strive to meet the individual developmental needs of children."
- **Play:** Survey respondents felt children would benefit from playful, fun and joyful interactions.
  - o "I would tell them to look for a program that has structure with their daily activities and provides multiple types of learning like playing together, learning at their age level and allowing them to play on their own."
  - o "Encourage children to be curious."
  - o "There should be individualization and opportunity for free play."
  - o "Look for a program that puts the child's self-determined play at the forefront of its pedagogy, practice, and learning environment. Teachers should be attentive, responsive, and show interest in the child's play and the child's own perspectives on their play. Teachers communicate regularly with the family about the child's experiences, but not at the expense of having time to adequately reflect, plan and prepare."
- **Outdoor/nature based:** This theme broadly referred to the outdoor environment in child care and early education settings, with some respondents specifically calling out nature-based curricula, good quality physical surroundings, or environmental concerns.
  - o "A large outdoor play/classroom area, with a facility has been tested for lead that the drinking water source is known, age/condition of building, and eco-friendly cleaning/disinfection practices."
  - o "Look what their outdoor environment is. Is it a learning environment or just a play space?"
  - o "Ask, 'how often do the kids go outside?'"

- o "A caring teacher, a program that offers a form of curriculum, feedback for the parents of how child is doing, what child is doing, good meals, inside/outside area to play with a variety of toys for all including different cultures/races."
- **Rated program:** Respondents both in groups and individually said they would look for a Rated program. Some specified they would look for 3 or 4-Star Rated programs; others mentioned the Parent Aware website.
  - o "Ask if they're part of Parent Aware, or if they are accredited. What is their commitment to quality?"
  - o "I guide them to look at Parent Aware in their area. One of the things that I tell them to look for is to see if the program is Star Rated."
- **Supportive of providers**
  - o "Programs that support (educationally, financially...) the adults that work directly with the children enrolled."
- **Warm and welcoming environment:** This category was often expressed as a "feel" or a "vibe," when a family first walks through the door. Respondents mentioned touring the facility, observing interactions between providers and children, and asking for references from other families.
  - o "The child care providers are responsive to the needs of each child. There are open, supportive and engaging experiences for children. Interactions between providers and children are warm and positive. Learning opportunities are developmentally appropriate, interactive and plentiful. They have the tools and are doing this for the right reasons."
  - o "I would tell the friend to ask how they do behavior guidance."
  - o "Is the diversity of families celebrated? Morale, turnover. Do the staff look happy?
- **Staff investment and compensation**
  - o "Is there indication of investment in professional development, mental health supports, and adequately compensated? Do they pay attention to supporting families and children with their mental well being?"

The following themes were also found in this first question about high-quality programs:

- Accreditation, arts/music, behavior guidance plan/practice, child development knowledge, child-centric environment, caring and nurturing environment, family needs met, healthy meals, kindergarten readiness, learning, low child/teacher ratios, low staff turnover, mixed age groups, providers who have been open at least several years, qualified teachers with credentials, reading, books, writing materials, review program policies, structure and routines, staff-to-staff interactions, screen time limited or none, and well-compensated staff.

Question Two

Question: Do you like the House Framework and the categories of quality included, or do you think they need to be changed? What, if any changes do you think the House Framework needs? A scale of 1-5 was provided. A response of 1 indicated "I do not like the House Framework. It needs to be completely different." A response of 5 indicated "I like the House Framework."

Figure 5. Individual Ratings of Parent Aware House Framework
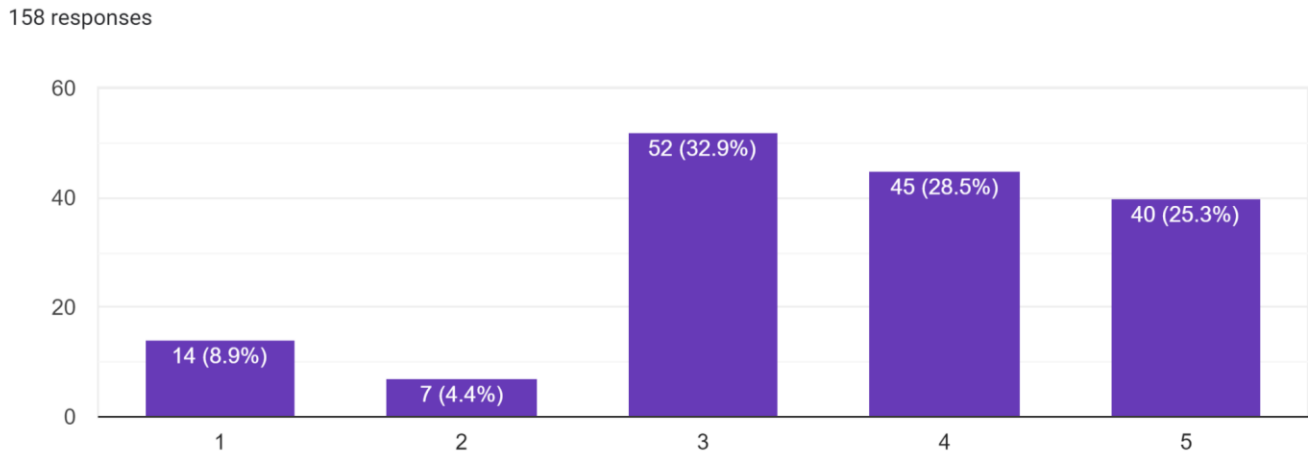
158 responses

Figure 9 indicates that most individual respondents (137 of 158 or 86.7%) rated the House Framework at a 3 or higher. 21 (13.3%) of the respondents rated the House Framework a 1 or 2.

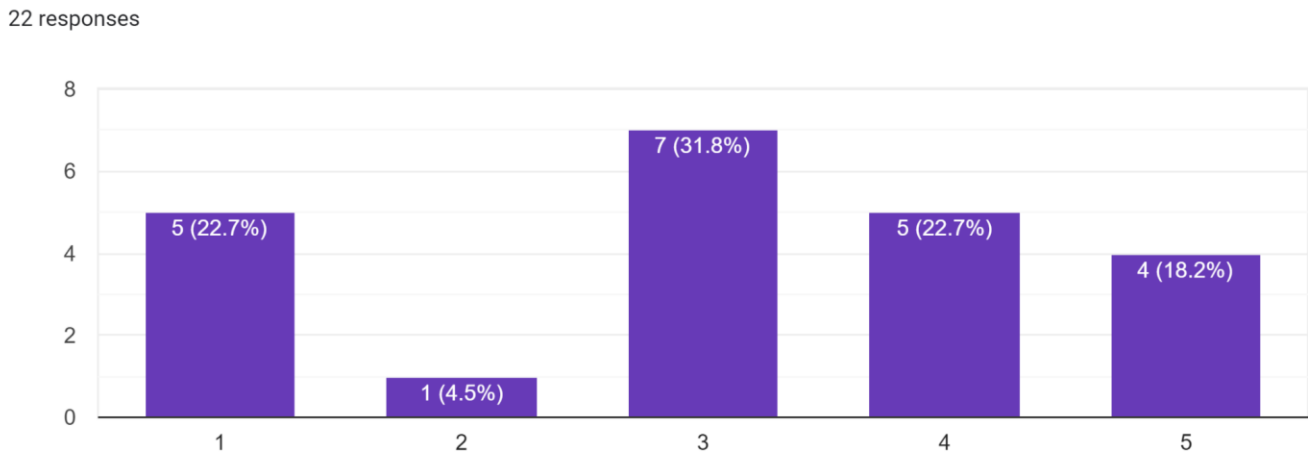**Figure 6. Group Ratings of Parent Aware House Framework**

22 responses

Figure 10 indicates that most group respondents (16 of 22 or 73%) rated the House Framework at a 3 or higher. 6 (27%) of group respondents rated the House Framework a 1 or 2.

Question Three

Question: What, if any, changes do you think the House Framework needs?

Respondents to this question replied both generally and specifically with changes. Overall, they wanted to see a more human-centered representation, as reflected in the themes below.

- **Avoid metaphors/different metaphor:** Many respondents felt strongly that the House was not an appropriate metaphor, or that metaphors should be avoided entirely. Some said the House metaphor was confusing, and not embraced much, if at all, by providers. Others said it was okay, but they questioned if it was appropriate. They pointed out that all children do not live in a stereotypical house, like the one in the graphic. Participants urged the department to provide a more inclusive, dynamic metaphor if one is going to be used. Some offered suggestions such as a tree, pizza, puzzle, building blocks, flowers, sun and water, woven fabric to show connections and cohesion, or something with pictures of children, families and early educators.
    - "The journey of Parent Aware is not a house; it's a growing experience. A tree seems more interesting than a house; trees continue to grow."
    - "I have heard others suggest it should be a tree with the same sort of principles but a tree is always growing which I think is a good visual as well. I think the tree is a great idea."
    - "Eliminate the house. The image is too cluttered and confusing. Not all child care/ECE is located in a house. I would prefer to see a pyramid with needs for kids prioritized and that it is really clear quantitatively what quality means. Rate the space, the staff, the curriculum, and outcomes achieved by the facility."
    - "There was agreement [in my session] that Parent Aware needs an organizing framework, but that we shouldn't spend too much time on it, and that an updated one needs to be simpler, streamlined, and have a more inviting visual."
    - "The use of a 'house' perpetuates income hierarchy. Not all families live in houses."
    - "Maybe a symbol that is more organic."
    - "I would make sure it is tested with several key providers who can review it and explain it. Do their programs fit within this model? If not, is it a program or a communication issue? Also, can outcomes/goals/metrics of each component be added to each section? Often practitioners will use their own creativity and variance in delivering which makes it more critical that they understand the goals. And can it include more graphical communication elements? We as developers are very comfortable with this type of model, but how great would it be to spend a little money to create a colorful, engaging simple graphic model which communicates the above?"
- **Culturally responsive, equity, inclusiveness and diversity**
    - "Culture is missing from the House. Nothing in this framework reflects culture or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)."
    - "There is nothing about culture and celebrating families' uniqueness."
    - "Anti-bias, anti-racist, DEI focus is at the heart of the work."
    - "There is nothing in the house that represents culture, if we are framing things with equity and culture it should show up in the house."
    - "Equity should be added in some way to this framework."
    - "I wonder if there should be a specific visual for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging."
    - "Add a pillar for equity and inclusion."
    - "Include language that is specific to inclusion."

- **Different providers excel in different areas:** Survey respondents often mentioned that providers' strengths were grouped into a "one size fits all" framework. In particular, respondents mentioned that family child care deserved more recognition for its unique strengths.
  - "In regard to assessment and planning, I think this is one of the reasons why family child care providers do not move up, because it seems so formal. We have heard from families it felt too formal and too institutionalized; is there a different way to show individualization?"
  - "The house is too rigid and does not allow for flexibility."
  - "The house is forcing quality in a specific way."
  - "I think it gets the point across, and yet every quality provider excels in different areas than others, and I think that should be weighed in overall quality rating. I feel most parents' idea of quality is: will they love my child, help him/her learn, keep him/her safe, be reliable, and be affordable."
  - "Have a 'shelf' with each of the items listed in the house available for the program to choose from."
- **Focus on continuous quality improvement**
  - "It gives a good overview of "quality" but sends the message that once the house is built, it is complete. When we think about continuous improvement, a visual like an infinity sign or something similar messages the importance of it being an ongoing work in progress."
  - "I wonder if there is a different metaphor than the house that could better illustrate the progress toward building quality."
  - "I am curious where the coaching aspect for teachers would come from and what that might look like."
- **More focus on families:** Respondents said they would like to see more focus on providers' relationships with families.
  - "We have to focus on families first. It should be the foundation."
  - "Include parent satisfaction with the provider."
- **More focus on providers/more supports for providers:** Both center and family child care respondents thought that the role of provider needed stronger recognition in the framework. They mentioned wellbeing and provider compensation.
  - "What's missing from this house framework is the quality of the workforce. The workforce is the foundation and structure that holds this whole house up. It's the staff who are doing the teaching, relationship-building, the assessments, etc."
  - "You all need to create a team that can help our new family child care provider. Create a new road map for the good of the provider as well as the children that may enter into a program. You all need to partner with providers."
  - "Job supports for the workforce are missing from the House Framework. How can a program be called quality if staff are receiving $15/hour? Parent Aware could include proposed wage scales that reflect similar industries that require a high degree of training. Parent Aware needs to support programs to offer such salaries and benefits, since we know current business models are unsustainable."

- o "Both assessment and professionalism are higher level elements that we build on top of the relationship foundations. To be clear, these are also the things that centers need more coaching, training, and financial support, if they are to happen well."
  - o "Providers want to know why Parent Aware is beneficial, how it supports/extends what they're already doing, and how it will benefit their program and themselves as individuals."
- **Relationships key to quality**
  - o "Play, time in nature, and relationships are central to quality care, and the current framework doesn't mention any of these key components of quality."
  - o "Relationships with children and relationships with families are more important than the assessment pillar."
- **Stronger health and wellbeing focus**
  - o "Health and wellbeing. What is the definition/criteria of that?
  - o "Health and wellbeing of the children should be the biggest section."
  - o "We didn't see mental health for staff and children."
  - o "Does health and wellbeing consider the provider as well as the children?"
  - o "Overtly call out BOTH physical and mental, healing-centered, trauma informed health/wellbeing."
- **Successful learner equation/role of community:** Respondents wanted to see something specifically about community in the framework. Some mentioned "ready communities," a term used by the Minnesota Department of Education.
  - o "The house is sitting by itself. Children do not reside by themselves, they reside in a community."
  - o "Make it a tree. Community and cultural things need to be added."
  - o "Similar to the successful learner equation, quality child care and early education is dependent on ready communities."
- **Systems focus**
  - o "There should be a portion of the ground that acknowledges the overall systems in the U.S. and in Minnesota in part because the lack of supportive systems and/or broken systems here for families and teachers helps tell the story of why some parts of the "house of quality" are so hard to achieve. For example, we can't meet professional development goals for Parent Aware if we are always having to rehire teachers and start back at 0 out of 50 hours because our profession is undervalued and underpaid. We can't do x, y, z specialized activities in the classroom to meet Parent Aware indicators if we are completely focused on keeping children safe and managing behaviors while families struggle to get the outside medical and mental health support they and their children need. Our systems need to be strong for all of these additional things to happen."

Question Four

Question: Currently, the goal of Parent Aware is "individualized teaching and learning for every child." To what extent do you agree this should be the goal of Parent Aware? (For question 4, a scale of 1-5 was presented. A response of 1 indicated "The goal needs to be completely different." A response of 5 indicated "I like this goal and would not change it.")

Individual Survey Results

Figure 7. **Individual Ratings of the Current Parent Aware Goal**
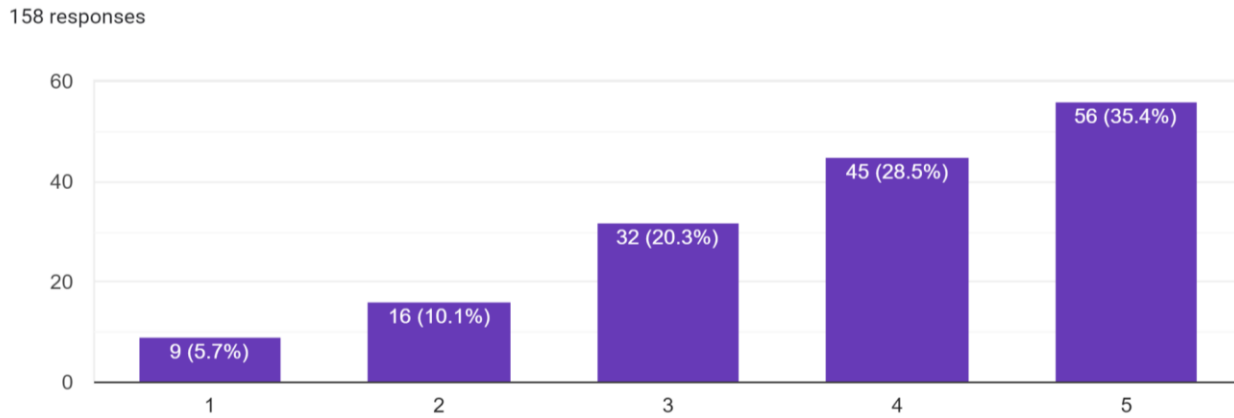
158 responses

Figure 11 indicates that most respondents (133 of 158 or 84.2%) rated the current Parent Aware goal at a 3 or higher. 25 (15.8%) of respondents rated the current Parent Aware goal at a 1 or 2.

Group Survey Results

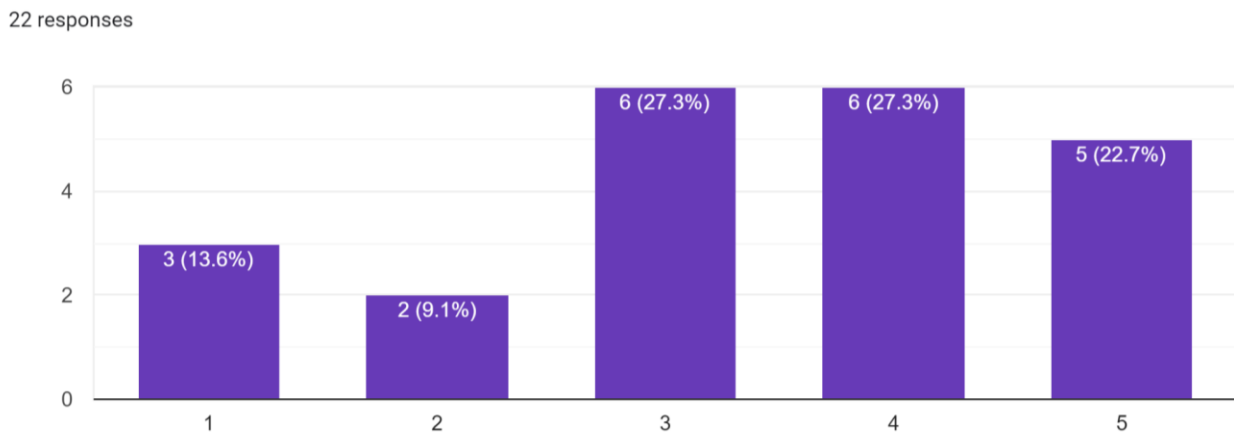**Figure 8. Group Ratings of the Current Parent Aware Goal**

22 responses

Figure 12 indicates that most group respondents (17 of 22 or 77.3%) rated the current Parent Aware goal at a 3 or higher. 5 (22.7%) of group respondents rated the current Parent Aware goal at a 1 or 2.

Question 5

Question: What, if any, changes do you think should be made to Parent Aware's goal of individualized teaching and learning?

Respondents often felt a mismatch between a goal of individualized instruction and realities in both center and family settings. One mentioned the goal as written is a strategy, not a goal or means to an end. While many thought the goal was aspirational, they questioned if it is practical, calling out the need for more resources across child care and early education settings in order to achieve it, similar to what a school district might provide. As in the question about the House Framework, some respondents were unaware this was even a goal.

- **Add "care" to the goal:** The concept of caring for children, not just teaching, was mentioned frequently as a goal.
    - "The goal should be happy, healthy children and professionals who feel safe and valued."
    - "Better would be a statement that elevates care, community, and discovery. Something like this: early care and education as environments of trust, warmth, and safety that support each child in their exploration, self-expression, and relationship-building, and discovery of the world."
- **Add a goal for providers as well**
    - "It should be something more aligned with supporting each individual child's development, across all domains, with educators that understand why they're doing what they're doing. A tool to help families find programs going above and beyond in the interest of children."
    - "Individualized teaching, coaching and learning for every child and educator."
- **Add data-based decision making**
    - "Require data driven decision making around intentional teaching for children."
- **Add equity**
    - "The goal implies 'equity' but doesn't explicitly state it. I would love to see a goal that calls equity out."
- **Allow goal to vary/programs show their uniqueness**
    - "The goal should be different and should be chosen by the program."
    - "Programs can show the case of what makes them unique and different to service their families."
    - "Teaching and learning' sounds like K-12; for young children we need to know they are being loved and supported."
- **Include meeting each child where they are and the skills they come with**
    - "It would be nice if there was some acknowledgement of partnership or community to ground the commitment to each unique child."
    - "For us, the focus on individualized teaching and learning for each unique child is held in relationship with commitment to the community/neighborhood. I'm guessing that falls outside the scope of Parent Aware, but it would be nice if there was some acknowledgement of partnership or community to ground the commitment to each unique child."
    - "It is important to meet each child where they are at and the skills that they come to us with."
    - "It's a good goal, because every child learns differently, and at different levels."
- **Less focus on academics**
    - "I think this focuses too heavily on academic outcomes. In the early years, children inherently learn through play. A goal with a focus on supporting the whole child's development through play and individualized approaches to SEL would better fit the needs of early learners."
- **Make it a more manageable goal**

- "As educators, it is important to remember that to individualize learning there needs to be support for staff in the classroom especially when dealing with multiple behavioral issues with children. It makes individualized teaching and learning much more challenging."
- "Ratios make the goal difficult. If ratios were lower, it would be easier to individualize."

- **What does 'individualized' mean?**
  - "Too 'pie in the sky.' There's nothing about how the child is actually DOING, about child outcomes, about supports for educators. How would Parent Aware would even define, or hold providers accountable for, individualized teaching and learning for each child? It seems unattainable for providers, especially those at lower Rating levels or considering being Rated at all."
  - "The goal should tie to the NAEYC guidelines... Individualization within a group context. Care and education that enhances each child's development and learning within the context of the family and community."
  - "Quality care for students with special needs is hard to come by."

Overall Parent Aware Feedback

Questions 6 and 7 were open-ended questions about Parent Aware overall. They were:

- If you could change one thing about Parent Aware, what would it be and why?
- Please share anything else regarding Parent Aware that you want us to know.

The responses to these questions were sorted by themes. The themes that emerged, along with illustrative quotes, are below.

- **Make the Parent Aware process more meaningful**
  - Need more frequent and consistent interaction with Parent Aware
    - "Help it to feel like a system that can continuously support child care programs to grow."
    - "Both the 'training' perspective and the 'paperwork' or 'documentation' perspective are inadequate in fully embracing a culture of continuous quality improvement and devoting to service for children and families."
  - Ensure the Ratings mean something
    - "We need to change the perception that Parent Aware is a glorified training program or that it is about documenting what you are already doing."
    - "I don't feel like some of the items requested are valuable or really tell quality in a center."
    - "A lot of the time it feels like busy work to just get the points. Needs to be more meaningful so that educators can feel the changes they are making."
  - Need more meaningful and constructive feedback
    - "Completing the Quality Documentation Portfolio feels like busy work. It doesn't feel like it improves my program quality at all."
    - "The individuals who observe are not always educators, and don't always give authentic feedback, and this is only a snippet of a teacher's skills. What about having CLASS

[observation assessment] still be a part of the process, and way to gauge growth of an educator instead? Maybe REETAIN [wage bonus program] could be connected to this growth?"

- "The current system for recognizing what counts as 'high-quality professional development' leaves much to be desired. It often costs centers more to get their staff the required training than what they get back through grants. Until we solve the child care workforce shortage crisis, we will continue to struggle with child care quality. There needs to be more incentive (beyond the goodness of their hearts) for people to get into and stay and grow in this field."

- Better learning and growth opportunities are needed
  - "We need some new courses and more enthusiastic teachers."
  - "Every program participating in Parent Aware needs to receive CLASS coaching."
  - "[Need more] online options."

- **Make Parent Aware participation more accessible**
  - Need more time and resources to participate
    - "The process for rating tends to be extended. It's too complex for those who are busy."
    - "Be flexible, but still have a deadline. Similar to what we had during Covid."
  - Attend to equity and inclusion issues in the process
    - "More accessibility to other cultures and languages, especially when reaching credentials and we need to identify training opportunities in some native languages."
    - "[Need] greater inclusivity (including language) for scholarship recipients."
    - "Appreciate the stated focus on racial and linguistic equity and would encourage you to really focus on the Parent Aware Racial Equity Plan elements!"
  - Paperwork must be clarified and streamlined
    - "There is a lot of paperwork associated with it. Some of it seemed redundant and almost busy work. I understand the need for the evidence portions of the program, but it seemed tedious to get it all together. There needs to be a better way to showcase a quality program. I would consider more of the experience of teachers and not just their education."
    - "The current process is long and cumbersome. I loved working with the coach/mentor however, getting all the information into a portfolio while operating a center and having to mail the huge packet was daunting. If it was all submittable in an on-line process it would be a bit easier to me."
    - "Don't have providers submit the same paperwork year after year when/if nothing has changed in their program-----too much busy work...."
    - "Streamline the language in the portfolio requirements so it's more consistent and understandable. Some of them require goals be put into Equip, some do not. Some require evidence, some require descriptions, and sometimes the word "plan" is used to mean two different things."
  - Improve the Develop data system, overseen by the Department of Human Services, the associated processes for approving training and how Develop is used. Develop is the data

system through which individuals and child care and early education programs find and track professional development and education and apply for and receive Parent Aware ratings.

- "I don't understand why Develop has any authority over my program. Who are they? Why do they get to decide what hours count towards an arbitrary goal so that the children in my care can get scholarships? The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) should be the agency in charge OR Develop's criteria should match MDE. I understand the need for a baseline requirement for professional development especially for people new to the profession or who need guidance in selecting professional development. However, Develop should accept a much wider range of clock hours especially while much of the Develop approved trainings are extremely poorly done and while there is such a lack of higher level/more experienced offerings."
- "So much of the Develop approved courses are very poorly taught and are boring and feel like an utter waste of time. I dread telling my staff that they have to do the courses."
- "The Parent Aware coaches need a better understanding of Develop profiles."
- "Training outside of Child Care Aware needs to be recorded in Develop."

- **Suggested adjustments to quality measures and Rating requirements**
  - Change "STAR" system
    - "Remove the stars and have a rolling cohort. This means that a coach would meet with programs and set goals that are customized to the needs of the program. PDAs would be a part of the process by having conversations about goals surrounding professional development. Also, this needs to be accomplished by translating resources and training so that meeting the standards is achievable without language barriers."
    - "I would change it to a 5 Star system so that it is more aligned with other states and stakeholders moving to MN would better understand. It also provides for a system much like a grading system that has a "midpoint" Rating, so there is "average" quality Rating and there is a 5 Star which would indicate an extremely high level of quality. Four Stars does not allow for enough differentiation in the Ratings."
  - Content or focus areas that should be incorporated into Standards, Indicators, Domains (organizational health and wellness, READ Act, Reading Corp content, child developmental stages/outcomes, life skills, high quality for staff and families, nature-based learning, professionalism, family relationships)
    - "This revision also needs to align with the READ Act. If the whole state is moving in a new direction on literacy, it would be a huge miss for this Parent Aware effort not to align on the early literacy front in terms of requirements for Rated providers."
    - "I value kindergarten readiness and would love to see some of the Reading Corps content included."
    - "Of course, we certainly want the program to be high quality for the children, which the current house structure and stated goal of Parent Aware makes clear. Additionally, we want the program to be high quality for the adults (staff and families) as well. Would

love to see more engagement and facilitated conversations between the families enrolled and the staff; move toward co-creation of policies and procedures."

- "Simplify the indicator set, focusing on those indicators that research shows us matter for children's development in all domains."
- "Parent Aware should include access to nature play and nature-based learning experiences as an important component of quality programming considering ever-growing data demonstrating the value of nature-based learning and play."

o Coordinate with child care program licensing

- "Need better coordination between the Rating requirements and the license requirements."
- "Parent Aware should be at some point mandatory for licensed child care programs."
- "Parent Aware should align with MN teaching licenses. If an early childhood teacher in the state already holds a license, they shouldn't have to do additional training to meet Parent Aware expectations."

o Acknowledge different provider types - especially family child care vs. centers

- "It seems like we're trying to make this tool work for school-based setting and child care setting, and they're two extremely different settings with extremely different pools of people that they draw from."
- "This still treats experienced providers zero credit for years of child education/care experience."
- "Make adaptations in requirements for family child care programs. For example, providing a schedule for both infants/toddler and preschoolers - not realistic for FCCs. Allow them to have one schedule with adaptations written on it for younger children."

o Provide more flexibility with Rating requirements

- "Add more options for curriculum use - a design-your-own, that has all the components needed for proper learning."
- "The professional development requirements are not reasonable."
- "I would base the rating off more observations."
- "The CLASS observation scores should NOT count against a program's Rating."

o Acknowledge previous Ratings

- "Rather than being Rated every two years, being Rated every five years to go along with training requirement makes more sense. Gives the programs opportunities to build quality and use that time. It seems like we get Rated and then we are turning around to be Rated again so quickly. Directors and teachers have so much to do, and the Rating process takes a lot of time uploading docs etc. I would rather spend time with more evaluation of my program and implementation of building more quality."
- "I feel that once a program meets the 4 Star Rating, they should not have to put the same portfolio together over and over. Why not have a coach do a revaluation every year and make the required recommendations."
- "Once Rated, I believe that it can go longer between cohorts. It's hard to find different classes to take to become recertified."

- **The role of culture, identity and language access**
  - "[We need] more accessibility to other cultures and languages, especially when reaching credentials, and we need to identify training opportunities in some native languages."

- **Expectations and support**
  - "I do love what it stands for, but there is a lot of work that goes into becoming Parent Aware Rated and a lot of providers are already trying to juggle their lives at home."

V. Next Steps

The information gathered during this engagement will inform ideas for changes, which will be tested through a second round of engagement carried out in collaboration with Child Trends, the contractor carrying out the Parent Aware evaluation. The second round of engagement is planned for Jan. through Feb. 2024.

VI. Appendix

A. Survey

Parent Aware Redesign: House Framework and Quality Practices

Introduction

This survey is part of a larger group of projects called the Parent Aware Redesign (for more information see the Department of Human Services Parent Aware Redesign page). The Redesign will make improvements to Parent Aware that center racial, cultural, linguistic, ability and geographic equity.

Changes to Parent Aware are planned for 2026. An evaluation of Parent Aware is also underway. Feedback provided from this and other surveys and engagements, combined with information from the evaluation, will be used to update what Parent Aware is and how it works.

Parent Aware House Framework

This survey asks you to share your perspective on the House Framework, including the categories that define quality. Please open and read this short description of the House Framework, and watch this 4-minute video (a transcription of the video is also available here), then answer the questions below.

It will take about 10 minutes to complete the survey. Responses are anonymous. If you have questions about this survey or need assistance please email us at dhs.child.care@state.mn.us.

1. A close friend is looking for early care and education for their children, ages 1 and 3. They say they want a "high quality program" and ask you what they should look for that would tell them a program is high quality.

    What do you tell them to look for?

2. The introductory video reviewed the Parent Aware House Framework and categories currently included in Parent Aware. To what extent do you like this framework and the categories of quality included?

    I do not like the "house" framework. It needs to be completely different.

    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
    - 5

    I like the "house" framework.

3. What, if any, changes do you think the House Framework needs?
4. Currently, the goal of Parent Aware is "individualized teaching and learning for every child." To what extent do you agree this should be the goal of Parent Aware?

    The goal needs to be completely different.

    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
    - 5

    I like this goal and would not change it.

5. What, if any, changes do you think should be made to Parent Aware's goal?
6. If you could change one thing about Parent Aware, what would it be and why?
7. Please share anything else regarding Parent Aware that you want us to know.

B. Parent Aware House Framework

The House Framework is made up of the following categories of quality practices:

(a) The foundation: health and well-being,

(b) The door: relationships with families,

(c) The left pillar: teaching and relationships with children,

(d) The right pillar: assessment and planning for each individual child,

(e) The siding: professionalism.

The house also has:

(f) The shingles: coaching, training and financial supports.

(g) The roof (the goal of Parent Aware): individualized teaching and learning for every child.

Parent Aware is built on the theory that by carrying out the practices in the categories shown in the House Framework, with the supports provided, early educators will have what they need to achieve the goal of individualized teaching and learning for every child.

This framework is how Parent Aware defines quality. For more information about the House Framework, see pages 6 – 7 of the Parent Aware Standards and Indicators.