



Parent Priorities in Selecting Early Learning Programs

Implications for Minnesota's Quality Rating & Improvement System

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This fact sheet gives an overview of the findings of “Parent Priorities in Selecting Early Care and Education Programs: Implications for Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System” a study commissioned by the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) and funded by the McKnight Foundation.

The study, authored by Dr. Aisha Ray, draws on information gathered from focus groups and interviews with parents and child care providers from six of Minnesota’s cultural communities—African American, American Indian, Hmong, Karen, Latino, and Somali—and was designed to explore questions surrounding how culture and language factor in the early care and education choices of parents and how that information could be reflected in Parent Aware, Minnesota’s Quality Rating and Improvement System.



How is this study relevant to MELF’s efforts?

At the center of MELF’s work is the goal of increasing the level of parent engagement in early care and education decisions. To help achieve this goal, MELF has partnered with several organizations to create Parent Aware, Minnesota’s pilot of what are known around the country as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). QRIS establish a quality standard for early care and education programs, rate programs based on the established standard, and make ratings available to the public. The purpose is two-fold: to help parents make informed choices about early care and education for their children, and to improve program quality over time by setting a high standard and supporting programs in meeting that standard.

When designing Parent Aware, the primary focus was on providing all Minnesota families with the information they need to select quality programs for their young children. There was recognition early on that QRIS in other parts of the country do a poor job of providing parents with information related to the cultural responsiveness of programs. To address this gap, MELF is working to better understand the kinds of information related to culture and language that parents consider when they are selecting early care and education for their children and to provide parents with that information through Parent Aware.

Overview of the Study

Thirty-four early childhood professionals and community leaders from six cultural communities were recruited to participate. Each participant interviewed three to four parents with young children in their community to learn about the cultural factors the parents consider when choosing an early childhood program. The participants then attended a culture-specific focus group and shared the results of the parent interviews and their own perspectives.

Study Communities

- African American
- American Indian
- Hmong
- Karen
- Latino
- Somali

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Overview of Findings

One hundred forty parents responded to questions related to five cultural and language factors. A majority of parents responded that all five cultural factors were 'very important' to them. Across all cultural groups, the percentage of parents ranking each factor as 'very important' was as follows:

- Caregivers and teachers understand the values and traditions of your cultural community – 90%
- Caregivers or teachers are sensitive to how you raise your child – 81%
- Program includes caregivers and teachers from your cultural community – 74%
- Caregivers or teachers talk to your child in your home language – 70%
- Program includes children and families from your cultural community – 64%

How can QRIS give parents the kind of information they are interested in?

The study suggests a number of program descriptors that parents would find useful when selecting a program for their child. The study suggests the following information may be useful to parents in their efforts to understand a program's cultural relevance, presented here in the Indicators of Quality categories used by Parent Aware.

Family Partnerships

- The role of families in bringing culture and language into the classroom.
- The program's approach to engaging families.
- Other support services provided to families.
- A description of the program's language policy (i.e. English only, multilingual, etc.).
- Availability of translators for parents.
- Formats used to provide information to families and family communication policy.
- Program's support for families getting to know one another, including cross-cultural engagement.

Teaching Materials/Strategies

- Information about the program's curriculum
- Information on the program's emphasis on social and emotional learning.
- The program's commitment to children's cognitive development and readiness for learning.
- A description of program policies and procedures that support a multicultural-anti-bias approach to families and children.
- The program's approach to early language and/or dual language curriculum and approach.
- Information about how the child's first language is dealt with within the classroom.

Teacher Training and Education

- Staff members' skills and training in working with families from different cultures and communities.
- Information about the capacity of the staff to speak to the family in its preferred language.
- Information about whether the caregivers and teachers have specialized training in ESL or bilingual early education.