

## Wisconsin Child Care Advisory and Recommendation Exchange (WI-CARE) Meeting Minutes February 10, 2026

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

### Attendees

#### WI-CARE Child Care Provider Members

- Bianca Hill, Milwaukee
- Carol Jackomino, Rhinelander
- Christine Larson Salerno, Milwaukee
- Cynthia Reineking, La Crosse
- Jay Martinez, Green Bay
- Jen Kalis, Onalaska
- Joahna Shelton, Spooner
- Jolynn Wendt, Arcadia
- Jose Martinez, Statewide
- Kahlila Fennell, Milwaukee
- Leighton Cooper, Milwaukee
- Liz Tittle, Little Chute
- Margarita Ugalde, Madison
- Rose Catlett, Middleton
- Ryann Counce Barnes, Milwaukee
- Shelly Boelter, Hager City
- Sheri Bishop, Pulaski
- Suzette Mayotte, Ashland
- Thanh Bui-Duquette, Eau Claire
- Tricia Peterson, Juneau

#### DCF Staff

- Andrea Cammilleri (tech/notes)
- Bridget Benson (notes)
- Sarah Dillinger (facilitator)
- Cassidy Farrey (facilitator)
- Daria Hall (facilitator)
- Terra Klein (facilitator)
- Cassidy Peterson (tech)
- Jason Rahn (notes)

## Meeting Notes

### Welcome, Reminder of Meeting Norms

**Presented by:** Daria Hall, Policy Initiatives Advisor, DCF Division of Early Care and Education

- Daria read through the meeting norms and meeting agenda. She then introduced Kassidy Farrey, Director of the Bureau of YoungStar.
- Kassidy talked about the January WI-CARE meeting in which DCF asked for members' reactions to proposed changes and questions around priorities, including the Wisconsin Elements of Quality, verification and reporting of programs' quality practices, and how DCF should prioritize its resources.
- Kassidy noted that in January, we gathered important feedback, but also acknowledged that some of the questions weren't as clear as we wanted. We also needed more time to fully answer the questions. Therefore, this meeting will include a revised set of questions and more of the time in breakouts.
- Kassidy introduced Terra Klein, Strategic Quality Initiatives Supervisor.
- Terra shared three major design choices for YoungStar:
  - Resources
  - Reporting
  - Validation
- In our current YoungStar system, resources are dedicated heavily toward rating with some coaching and technical assistance offered. Reporting consists of programs' star rating (a single summary rating) and validation of quality is accomplished through formal rating by an external rater.
- Terra then shared the questions for today's discussion.

### Question 1: Considering the high cost of rating and coaching services, which do you feel is the best investment for YoungStar to make to improve quality across the state?

#### *Breakout Room 1 Notes*

- For my small program, I think the focus should be on coaching and support. Rating is somewhat useful but it's just a number. More benefits would come from time invested in coaching. Being a family child care provider and "wearing all the hats" means she stays at 2 stars voluntarily because there's just not enough time to prioritize all the requirements to be rated higher. Providers need work/life balance. I would like an option that allows me to meet 3-5 star but doesn't require so much more time investment. Some things don't need to be revisited, and some things could be automated (documents already created for other programs can all be uploaded into a portal maybe?).
- I'm happy to have the opportunity to envision YoungStar. I feel there are not enough "high quality" centers in Wisconsin and coaching/supports would be more impactful. Incentives (money) when rated higher is helpful, but quality environments for kids and families is important to me, personally. NAEYC, NAC, City of Madison or Satellite accreditations can help reach those higher ratings, but cost money. When funding is low, focusing on 2 and 3 Star programs could help, yet incentives are why many programs reach for and want to stay at 4 and 5 stars.

- I agree that being a smaller program makes it difficult to find time to reach higher levels and find time to invest in education/training.

#### *Breakout Room 2 Notes*

- Coaching and supports are the priority for rural area teachers who are brand new. It's a lot of work for providers to get new teachers to the quality levels they need to be at, we could use help. I also want to see changes to teacher qualification requirements in YoungStar.
- I want to see group coaching and modeling, including modeling specific skills such as supporting children with challenging behaviors.
- Yes, I'm contacted quite a bit for Pyramid model coaching, not just resources, providers need lots of need around challenging behavior skill building.
- I like the coaching and support, but at this time I'm getting a lot through WEESN, the Milwaukee Public Library, etc but I don't have consistency across coaches. I like coaching but I also value rating. Some staff came into the field right out of high school – as they're in the field longer they're building passion but don't have time to go back and get the education they need.
- Coaching and supports should be the priority – to advance the knowledge, skills, abilities of educators.
- Minimize rating priority and use it to best know where to coach and go forward. I think rating and coaching are both needed. Please change the YoungStar education requirements and look at years in the field.

#### *Breakout Room 3 Notes*

- I think that we should flip the focus and put more emphasis on coaching and support. That has a direct impact on program quality. Currently, we receive ratings but don't provide enough opportunity for staff to grow and learn. That's evidenced in the 30-40% turnover rate in early childhood/child care professionals. We continue to have new people coming in who aren't familiar with best practices but YoungStar focusing on mentoring and training them would have a direct impact on their knowledge and the experience children have in their programs.
- I agree, invest in coaching and supports. Evidence shows there is more gain and if we want to keep people in the field, they need a lot of support on the front end getting started. Later, they may identify certain skill sets they want to improve in. The verification aspect could go hand-in-hand with the regulatory aspect. The programs that are supported will also have better outcomes with compliance due to higher skilled staff.
- I couldn't agree more. We're a five star program in rural Wisconsin. It's a resource desert. Any time we come up with anything new to work on, the weight is all on my shoulders, we don't have others to reach out to for support. I thoroughly appreciate coaching and support. In my last rating, the coach wasn't at the high quality level that we are at–nice person but they didn't have the background to help us maintain our 5 star. Even though we have reached that, I have staff turnover and I'm lucky to keep people for one year whereas in the past, I had them for 7-10. It takes a lot of effort to keep my main teachers and help the newer ones acquire skills. Going through the YoungStar checklist,



they say we're great but offer some suggestions and it's always appreciated. I definitely agree with emphasizing coaching and supports and think about how we could simplify rating and verification. Is there a portal where I could constantly submit things so they can look at lesson plans and observations. Travel is expensive just to get to my program, so communicating more via virtual methods would cut cost.

- I've been completely disappointed in YoungStar and switched to accreditation. I agree that I had a very poor coach. Just because I was 5 star and have 25 years of experience, doesn't mean I don't need the coaching. When YoungStar switched the system a while back, it was a lot to learn and I had questions. I don't need as much help as others but when I have questions, I want to get them answered. My coach didn't go over my rating with me. I have more support and help with accreditation. I do think ratings are important and as family provider, I emphasize that I'm 5 star. My day is different every single day. Just because I didn't use the water table while being observed, doesn't mean I don't, so I don't agree with the rating approach. A few visits throughout the week would be more useful. I know I'm not relaxed or the person I should be when that rater is there.
  - Thanks for saying all of those things, they're all very relevant.
- I agree with everything. Coaching is important for programs to help them move forward with grace and knowledge!

## Question 2: What quality information should we report on DCF's Child Care Finder webpage?

### Keep how it is now (single 1-5 star rating)?

### Add additional/different information?

#### *Breakout Room 1 Notes*

- I'm on the fence about rating, but I like having the standards clear to guide the quality improvement process. I like knowing what the goals should be. My program is very rural and finding/keeping educated staff is very difficult. I'm happy to send staff for courses and training but many times they leave for better opportunities (as they should, I support this). There's not a lot of funding to pursue accreditation but I think the process could be useful. I never have parents ask about the rating and I don't think it drives parent decisions. I also wonder if there's no rating, how would the quality "bonus" for YoungStar work? Do we need different incentives to drive programs looking to be recognized as higher quality?
- I agree the quality components (rating details) should be more for just providers and coaches to work from (doesn't need to be on Child Care Finder) as parents aren't asking about that. Parents only seem to ask questions about cost and availability in schedules. I suggest potentially a "level" over star rating. Providers that are really investing and going far above and beyond could be "platinum." I also feel (being a 2 Star myself) that the messaging around 2 Stars seems to feel as if the program is not "quality" but in reality the efforts going into the program is the main difference between an automated 2 and a program engaging in the process to improve quality – current messaging does not help emphasize the efforts that programs put in to improve quality even if the program is 2 Star. Would like a better way to display ongoing quality efforts.



- I agree that the rating is more for providers – and for other programs (the food program, etc). Giving more information about activities they are currently engaged in (as an example) is more valuable for parents. However, if a higher rating gets them more money (so they can pay more or retain qualified staff), that 5 Star becomes much more important to the program.
- I lead a 5 Star program currently – no one seems to ask about the star rating. I think it's good to keep the star rating because providers and staff (current and prospective) value it even if parents don't seem to ask about it. Higher ratings reward staff with a way to feel an accomplishment for work they've put in.

### *Breakout Room 2 Notes*

- Families choose care based on proximity and convenience, they don't necessarily understand or want to do research on quality indicators. Be mindful of the average person and how they'd interpret the definition of quality.
- Parents do look at star ratings. Other information to include could be pictures, feedback from parents, curriculum. Information about curriculum should be verified, otherwise I can just say anything.
- Parents do want to know about curriculum. It would be ideal to have star ratings for different parts of the program, like a rating for curriculum, a rating for adult education. I would like different ratings for different areas linked to quality standards.
- Each area should be rated separately and should be verified. But also, with no openings in child care programs, star ratings don't mean as much.

### *Breakout Room 3 Notes*

- I feel that I earned my 5-star rating so I like having it posted. I do think that the additional information we could potentially share about programs is also powerful. I seem to remember something about environments being reported in the past. We did a environment report with our quality rating--I thought that was on our Child Care Finder page. I haven't checked lately so maybe that's different now. I like having information about programs out there. We have 2 acres to play on and the other program in town has a small area. Some families might not want their kids to get dirty so they might prefer that. Giving more in-depth information about those kinds of details would be helpful.
- I worked very hard for my 5-star rating. It was months of preparation. It's work and I'm proud of what I do. I don't baby-sit the children. I'm always constantly trying to improve, going to extra classes, etc. I do tell people I'm 5-star because I'm proud of it. But I do think the rating needs to be different. Again, we can't exhibit everything within four hours. It's completely impossible to do this in a single rating. I do still want the rating and is something to be proud of, but they need to stop by more often at different times of day.
- I respect individuals' appreciation for the 5-star rating. However, my perspective is to advocate for a separate type of rating for school-based before- and after-school programs, including a separate licensing set of regulations. I've sat on steering committees and made recommendations on DCF 251 licensing rules. School-based programs are disadvantaged from many perspectives in the rating. Star ratings don't tell



the whole story of the program. My question is how do you really show what a program is doing? Curricular alignment with K-12 and meeting outcomes are not measured fully in the star rating. For school-aged programs and non-traditional child care, I don't think we benefit from star ratings because the story can't be told. It's a different viewpoint in a school-based setting.

- **DCF Facilitator:** Would you be interested in a more robust provider-reported detail page?
- Yes, I think something more personalized could be helpful. It could also be a considerable amount of work, especially since I oversee approximately 100 programs. It may not necessarily be like in the example slide, but something that better conveys what is going on in the program. Details and strengths are what help programs achieve those ratings, like the education of staff. Training them is a key part of what we do but we bring in so many new hires on an annual basis, we need to continue building Registry levels of new staff. All the effort put into training doesn't come out when you look at the star rating. Give programs opportunity to highlight what they're doing to pursue quality. One of the things I do like is that it attempts to streamline everything into a simple, easily understood rating, but the current criteria shouldn't be the only consideration. There's more that could be added to impact the star rating.
- There's a disconnect because a lot of work goes into being defined by the rating scale. There's a disconnect with the resource allocation. It's more about the support, so maybe revamping the rating system altogether aligns well with a tool that a person coming in could assess just those particular elements. We all agree health and safety is a key element. That could be one of them. Others might be other aspects related to quality around how children are interacting and learning. It would be nice to have opportunity to give evidence of the experiences we offer children. When someone assesses, it shouldn't be one specific thing to check a box, rather an overall simplified assessment of curricular learning, for example. 40% of families don't even know about YoungStar. So that means there's a disconnect between all this effort we are putting into rating and how we put it out to our families, there has to be some value to the families to make it worthwhile. YoungStar should make sure that providers can ensure children are continuously learning. Again, it's active learning, not just baby-sitting. How can they describe that in the Child Care Finder page? I also agree with the last comment regarding need for a totally different rating system for before- and after-school programs.
- I think every program is different and should be rated differently. Also, a program should be able to focus on its own goals and what is most important and valuable to a program.

### Question 3: Based on what you feel should be reported, how important is formal verification of programs' quality?

Is it necessary?

If yes, what would it look like in your ideal system?

#### *Breakout Room 1 Notes*

- This feels like a tricky question because I'm not as involved with YoungStar. My certifier would be verifying a lot of my work. Can regulation verify larger things and cover it in



regulation visits? Coaching, training and supports are more influential if you're not fully engaged with YoungStar.

- Paperwork – can providers use the portal to upload documents to verify certain areas of the rating? Matching coaches and providers is important – I feel the coaches may not have the experience I have and I feel like they use me as a therapist because I often know more than they do.

### *Breakout Room 2 Notes*

- I think it's important to verify certain items, including our curriculum and staff qualifications. Others don't need to be verified. As a director, I'm fine coaching my staff. I would like coaching for me as an administrator.
- Parents care most about whether their child is loved, cared for, and nurtured in a positive way. Parents look for quality relationships and rely on word of mouth.
- Not everything needs to be verified—some things should, others don't need it. Look at what's in licensing visits such as environment, staff qualifications, staff training.
- I question including years of experience in YoungStar. Sometimes new teachers provide better care than experienced teachers.
- Some things are already verified by licensing or the Registry.
- YoungStar shouldn't give credit for Associate or Bachelor's degrees that aren't in the early care and education field.
- I'm not currently receiving the YoungStar coaching I should be receiving.

### *Breakout Room 3 Notes*

- Could we submit results of a parent survey or poll sent to families and have the results impact our YoungStar rating?
  - **DCF Facilitator:** We are open to all possibilities at this time.
- I'm accredited so I'm just a little removed, it's been a couple years since I did YoungStar. It sounds like we could consider verifying through a survey or something for parents to acknowledge that a program is doing certain quality things. Could this look like a family survey to ask families about their experience in our program? Would that be a verification tool? In that case, there may need to be additional supporting documents to give evidence because if families aren't sure they might report that they don't know if something is happening or not, like whether we serve nutritious meals for example. So we could provide our menus as additional evidence.

### **Action Items**

- The majority of participants felt DCF should prioritize coaching and training as the most valuable investment of resources for DCF in improving programs' quality. However, some providers felt rating and reporting on quality should be equally emphasized in the updated program. No one argued that rating and reporting should be the primary investment in advancing quality.
- Carefully consider the role of financial incentives in motivating providers' pursuit of quality.
- Reduce the staff qualifications requirements in YoungStar.

- Continue to gather information about whether years of experience should be considered in staff qualifications.
- Reconsider the rationale for giving credit for degrees in disciplines other than early care and education.
- Support for challenging behaviors is a major need and providers would appreciate modeling, coaching, and resources on that topic.
- Work to increase the knowledge, skills, and consistency of coaches, and thoughtfully pair coaches with programs based on their interests and needs.
- Most providers valued verification of some aspects of quality, but several indicated that not all quality elements need to be externally verified by YoungStar.
- YoungStar processes should be streamlined and some aspects could be handled virtually (e.g., uploaded to a portal) to simplify and cut costs.
- To support YoungStar simplification, leverage what is already being verified via regulation and/or the Registry.
- Many agreed that ratings are more useful for providers (e.g., for recruiting staff) than for parents/caregivers. Families could benefit from different information shared in Child Care Finder (e.g., photos, curriculum, family experiences/feedback).
- Providers appreciate the opportunity to share details on their Child Care Finder page and like to showcase more information about what they are doing to pursue and maintain quality, but DCF should be mindful of how much time and effort this would require.
- School-based before- and after-school programs and other non-traditional forms of child care are not always compatible with current YoungStar rating criteria/processes and may require customized treatment, depending on how the program is revised.
- Explore ways to offer information about programs' quality in several areas rather than just one global rating. The simplicity of the star rating is nice but not as informative.
- Consider how elements of quality could be demonstrated more broadly in a variety of ways with different types of evidence, rather than requiring providers to demonstrate many discreet items on a checklist.
- Surveying families could be one new method of verifying aspects of quality.

### Wrap-Up, Public Comment and Next Steps

**Presented by:** Daria Hall, Policy Initiatives Advisor, DCF Division of Early Care and Education

- Next steps:
  - DCF will meet with other providers and families across the state to discuss these questions.
  - YoungStar project team members will likely return to WI-CARE with more detailed questions or proposals in the future.
  - Changes resulting from the work could be implemented in 2027-29.
- Next meeting: Mar. 13, 2026 at noon; Topic: Licensing Process Changes

### English

*The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002.*



*Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.*

**Spanish**

*El Department of Children and Families es un empleador y proveedor de servicios que ofrece igualdad de oportunidades. Si tiene alguna discapacidad y necesita acceder a servicios, recibir información en un formato alternativo o necesita que le traduzcan la información a otro idioma, comuníquese con el Division of Early Care and Education (Sección del cuidado y educación temprana) al 608-422-6002. Las personas sordas, con dificultades auditivas, sordo-ciegas o con discapacidad del habla pueden utilizar el Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – llame al 711 para comunicarse con el departamento.*