



# YoungStar

## Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

*As of June 19, 2019*

YoungStar is a 5 Star quality rating and improvement system for child care and school-age care providers based on education, learning environment and curriculum, business and professional practices, and the health and well-being of children. Through this rating system the state addresses several key issues in Wisconsin's child care system. YoungStar:

- Focuses on improving outcomes for children by improving the overall quality of care
- Creates multiple pathways to professional development opportunities and better quality for child care and school-age programs
- Creates a clear, understandable tool for parents to choose quality child care
- Creates incentives and provides support for programs to improve services, particularly for low-income children
- Improves accountability for the Wisconsin Shares system

### Question Topics

#### [Overview of the YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System \(QRIS\)](#)

##### **Families:**

- [Family Engagement](#)
- [Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program](#)

#### [School-Age Programs and Day Camps](#)

##### **YoungStar Evaluation Criteria:**

- [Educational Qualifications](#)
- [Learning Environment and Curriculum](#)
- [Business and Professional Practices](#)
- [Child Health and Well-Being](#)

#### [Regulatory Compliance](#)

#### [Four-Year-Old Kindergarten \(4K\)](#)

#### [Head Start and Early Head Start](#)

#### [Accreditation](#)

## Answers

### Answers: Overview of the YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

#### ***What is quality in an early childhood setting, and why does quality matter?***

There is much research that defines quality in early childhood settings and tells us that quality matters a great deal. Here is just one excerpt from this research, but you can find many others:

*Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education* (2013) by Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Christina Weiland, et al. (<http://fcd-us.org/resources/evidence-base-preschool> or <http://www.srcd.org/policy-media/policy-updates/meetings-briefings/investing-our-future-evidence-base-preschool>)

Excerpted from pp. 14-15:

[E]vidence across decades of evaluation research now permit us to say with confidence that preschool programs can have a substantial impact on early learning and development. Positive effects on children's development are found for language, literacy and early math skills; for social and emotional outcomes; and in children's health.... [P]reschool education benefits children from middle-income as well as low-income families (although children from low-income children benefit more). The most recent research also makes clear that there are positive effects for dual language learner children as well as for those whose home language is English, and for children with special needs as well as for typically developing children....

[C]hildren who have attended preschool go on to show positive effects on important adolescent and young adult outcomes, such as high school graduation, reduced teen pregnancy, years of education completed, earnings, and reduced crime....

The evidence continues to grow that the foundation for positive effects on children are interactions with teachers that combine stimulation and support. Such interactions build children's higher-order thinking skills as well as knowledge of specific content (such as early math and language skills), and at the same time are warm, responsive and elicit reciprocal interactions....

Finally, while it has been clear for some time that high-quality preschool education yields more in benefits to society than its initial costs, the most recent work indicates that there is a positive return on investment for a range of differing preschool programs, from those that are more intensive and costly to those that require less initial investment. In sum, quality preschool education is an investment in our future.

#### ***What is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and what does it accomplish?***

A QRIS is a method to observe, assess, rate, and improve the quality of child care programming. It is also used to communicate the level of child care quality to parents and families choosing child care providers and locations.

YoungStar is a QRIS that includes four key parts:

- Training and technical assistance for child care providers
- Observation and rating of child care programs
- YoungStar Quality Adjustments based on ratings
- Communication to families about the star rating system

YoungStar guides quality improvement in child care throughout the state of Wisconsin by supporting providers who want to improve the quality of their care, by creating financial incentives to deliver better services to children, and by giving parents meaningful information to select child care for their children.

## ***What areas of a program are rated?***

The standards that programs must meet to earn certain star levels are research-based guides linked to quality and include:

- Lead Teacher/Group Leader and Director/Site Supervisor/Provider Educational Qualifications
- Learning Environment & Curriculum
- Business & Professional Practices – including business practices, staff benefits, and family involvement
- Child Health and Well-Being

YoungStar has established minimum point requirements in each of the four areas listed above to ensure that programs have a balanced approach to quality and are making improvements in *all* areas of programming, not just in one or two areas.

## **Answers Involving Families: Family Engagement and Wisconsin Shares**

### **Family Engagement**

#### ***How are families told about YoungStar?***

DCF works closely with partners to publish YoungStar ratings using a variety of media in which families can learn about their child care options. DCF has also designed a website to assist those searching for child care or looking for more information on a specific child care program. The **Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search** website provides detailed information about YoungStar ratings as well as compliance records for licensing and certification:

<http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov>

To serve families, DCF has partnered with several groups to ensure that families are equipped with concrete, objective information regarding quality child care. Some of these partners are:

- Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies: <http://supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-resource-referral-agencies/>
- Family Resource Centers: <http://supportingfamilies.together.org/family-resource-centers/>
- County Agencies: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/regionaloperations>
- Parents Plus: <http://parentspluswi.org/>
- W-2 Programs: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/w2/parents/w2>
- Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://www.wiaap.org/>
- Job Centers: <http://www.wisconsinjobcenter.org/directory/>

#### ***What is posted about child care programs on the DCF child care search website, and how does this help families select child care?***

All regulated child care programs are listed on the website regardless of their participation in YoungStar. YoungStar participants also have detailed information provided about their star levels and the points they have earned in each of the four rating areas.

Families selecting a YoungStar provider benefit from having chosen a licensed and certified child care program that has taken extra steps to improve its child care programming.

Information about the health and safety of the child care program is also provided through the child care search. Child care certifiers and licensors visit each provider periodically and monitor for compliance of health and safety rules like the ration of children to teachers and the safety of the environment. After each visit, that information is added to the child care finder. If a parent has a question about a licensing or certification violation that is listed for a particular program, they can contact the DCF Regional Office in their area.

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccregulation/choosing> was developed by DCF to help families make the very important decision of locating child care arrangements that are right for them. DCF encourages families to read this guide, along

with YoungStar information, when considering the child care center that best meets the needs of their children, as well as their own family needs.

- *Tips for Choosing Child Care:* <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccregulation/choosing>
- YoungStar Information: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar>

DCF also encourages families to talk with the centers they are considering. Families may also contact the local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for additional help and information:

Click: <http://supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-resource-referral-agencies/>  
Call Toll-Free: 1 (888) 713-KIDS

## **Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program**

### ***Who can participate in YoungStar, and who must participate in YoungStar?***

***Mandatory Participation:*** Programs that currently serve children from families that utilize Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy payments *must* participate in YoungStar.

***Voluntary Participation:*** Participation in YoungStar is voluntary for programs that do *not* accept Wisconsin Shares payments from families.

### ***What is Wisconsin Shares, and how is it related to YoungStar?***

Wisconsin Shares is Wisconsin's child care subsidy program that helps families pay for child care. To receive Wisconsin Shares payments from families, providers must participate in YoungStar.

To promote quality in child care, Wisconsin includes a YoungStar quality adjustment to be paid directly to 4 Star and 5 Star rated child care providers who have current Wisconsin Shares authorizations:

- 5 Stars = A separate YoungStar quality adjustment, for up to 30% of current Wisconsin Shares authorization amounts, will be made directly to the selected child care program
- 4 Stars = A separate YoungStar quality adjustment, for up to 15% of current Wisconsin Shares authorization amounts, will be made directly to the selected child care program

Additionally, Wisconsin Shares subsidy amounts are impacted by the child care providers star rating in the following manner:

- 3, 4 or 5 Star Provider - Programs will receive Wisconsin Shares payments directly from parents utilizing the new MyWICildCare EBT card. Each parent's subsidy amount will be calculated by first taking the county maximum or the provider's price (whichever is lower), and then the parent's copayment will be subtracted from the total. Finally, that amount will be loaded onto the card.
- 2 Star Provider - Programs will receive Wisconsin Shares payments directly from parents utilizing the new MyWICildCare EBT card. The authorized Wisconsin Shares subsidy amount will be reduced by 1% before being placed on the new MyWICildCare EBT card.
- 1 Star Provider - Families are not eligible for Wisconsin Shares subsidy amounts if they attend a 1 Star rated program. These providers' child care licenses or certifications have been revoked, denied or suspended, or their Wisconsin Shares payments have been ended due to fraud or suspected fraud.

Wisconsin Shares information and resources for parents and providers are provided at:

- My WICildCare Program: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/mywchildcare>
- Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/wishares/parents>

In order to be eligible to receive Wisconsin Shares payments from families, child care programs must be in regulatory compliance (2 Star rating or higher) and must participate in YoungStar. YoungStar ratings are thus required for all programs receiving Wisconsin Shares payments from families.

Also, in order to participate in YoungStar, the program must agree to accept children from families who utilize Wisconsin Shares subsidy payments. Programs that sign a YoungStar Contract must be willing to:

- Accept children from families receiving Wisconsin Shares
- Comply with the contract they have signed with DCF and with Licensing/Certification
- Have a YoungStar rating every other year

### **Answer: School-Age Programs and Day Camps**

#### ***Are school-age programs and day camps included in YoungStar?***

YoungStar includes:

- Certified and public school-age programs
- Licensed Day Camps enrolling children for 14 weeks or fewer

### **Answers about YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Educational Qualifications, Learning Environment & Curriculum, Business & Professional Practices, and Child Health & Well-Being**

#### ***How important is a provider's education?***

Research indicates that providers with college education around early childhood development tend to provide higher quality care than providers with lower levels of education.

Other states with quality rating and improvement systems confirm that education is linked to higher quality early care and education settings, which lead to improved outcomes for children. In Wisconsin, YoungStar celebrates the educational achievements of child care providers by including an Educational Qualifications category in our rating system.

#### ***What aspects of the learning environment and curriculum are considered by YoungStar?***

YoungStar looks at whether a program has completed a self-assessment and has a Quality Improvement Plan in place. YoungStar also considers whether providers have been trained on standards/frameworks for learning (the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards or the School-Age Curricular Framework) and whether the program's curriculum has been aligned with these standards. Programs can also earn YoungStar points by assessing children's learning, using assessment information to develop appropriate lesson plans to build children's strengths, and tracking children's progress.

As a tool to aid in rating program quality, YoungStar raters will use an Environment Rating Scale, which helps raters examine space and furnishings, personal care routines, health and safety, use of language, activities, interactions, program structure, and provisions for parents and staff.

#### ***What aspects of children's health and well-being are considered by YoungStar?***

Above and beyond the health and safety requirements of regulated child care, YoungStar looks at whether a program has created specific goals around improving nutrition and/or physical activity practices. YoungStar also considers whether providers have training in social-emotional development, inclusion of children with special needs, and factors that protect children and families from abuse, neglect, and stress.

#### ***How important is family engagement/involvement/leadership?***

YoungStar recognizes the importance of family engagement in its Business and Professional Practices quality indicators. Programs cannot earn above a 2 Star rating without demonstrating some quality family engagement practices.

## ***Are there any requirements for staff training in how best to serve children with disabilities or with physical, developmental, or social and emotional special needs?***

Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies can now refer parents to child care, school-age programs, and day camps appropriate for their children with disabilities or other special needs:

Click: <https://supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-resource-referral-agencies/>  
Call Toll-Free: 1 (888) 713-KIDS

Programs that complete training in inclusive child care and supporting children's optimal development can receive YoungStar points. For example, YoungStar gives points to programs if a percentage of staff has obtained either The Registry Inclusion Credential or training in the Wisconsin Pyramid Model for Social and Emotional Competence. Points may be earned if providers complete other specialized training, too. Each program's detailed point rating is available on the *Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search* site, and families can access these details to see which points have been earned:

<http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/BasicSearch.aspx>

### **Answers: Regulatory Compliance**

#### ***What is regulated child care?***

"Regulated" means child care is either:

- Certified by the County/Tribe or Milwaukee Early Care Administration (MECA),
- Licensed by the State, **or**
- Operated by a public school board.

***Note: To be eligible to receive Wisconsin Shares payments from families, providers must be regulated.***

**Licensed Child Care.** Under Wisconsin law, no person may provide care and supervision for four or more children under the age of 7 for less than 24 hours a day unless that person obtains a license from DCF to operate a child care program. This requirement does **not** include a child's relative or guardian who provides care and supervision for the child; a person employed to come to the home of the child's parent or guardian for less than 24 hours a day; a county, city, village, town, school district, or library that provides programs primarily intended for recreational or social purposes; or a public or parochial school. ***However, programs operated by private or parochial schools must be licensed in order to receive payments from families utilizing the Wisconsin Shares Subsidy Program.***

Find more information on DCF Child Care Licensing at: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cclicensing>

**Certified Child Care.** There is a voluntary form of regulation in Wisconsin for those child care programs that are not required to be licensed. This type of regulation is called certification. Counties/Tribes certify child care homes and some school-age child care programs. Certification is available for those families who wish to receive a child care subsidy, but who do not choose to use licensed care.

Find more information on DCF Child Care Certification at: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cccertification>

**Quality Child Care.** YoungStar goes beyond licensing and certification regulations and helps parents choose child care on the basis of *quality*.

Choosing child care may seem an overwhelming task, especially if you are new to child care services. To search for safe, quality child care in Wisconsin, see the ***Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search*** page:

<http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/BasicSearch.aspx>

***If there is a complaint regarding a regulated child care program, where should it be directed?***

Anyone can report a complaint to DCF (<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccregulation/complaint>) concerning a *licensed or unlicensed center*. When DCF is alerted to potential violations of administrative rule, licensing staff conduct a thorough investigation. If the complaint is substantiated, the violations are documented and the center is expected to take prompt corrective action.

Complaints concerning *certified* child care programs shall be made to the local certifying agency, at:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/ccregulation/cccertification/certifiers.pdf>

**Answer: Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)**

***Do 4-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) programs participate in YoungStar?***

During the 2013-14 school year, 93% of Wisconsin public school districts offered four-year-old kindergarten (4K) to age-eligible four-year-old children. When providing 4K programming, Wisconsin public school districts choose between two options:

- Working entirely *within the public school system* to provide 4K.
- Working *with community partners* (including child care programs) to provide 4K. This option is the ***4K Community Approach (4KCA)*** option.

In a 4KCA program, the child care portion of the program may participate in YoungStar if at least one (1) hour of child care service is provided per day, outside of the public-school-supported 4K portion of the day. If the 4KCA child care program accepts Wisconsin Shares subsidy payments from families, it ***must*** participate in YoungStar.

**Answer: Head Start and Early Head Start**

***Do Head Start programs participate in YoungStar?***

Head Start may be available through several approved program options, including center-based, licensed family child care homes, and home-based options. Descriptions of these models are available on the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are included in YoungStar. The specifics of YoungStar participation vary according to the number of hours of child care provided by the site and paid for by families utilizing Wisconsin Shares subsidies.

**Answer: Accreditation**

***How do accredited programs earn YoungStar ratings?***

Accredited programs are awarded ratings of 4 or 5 Stars, based on the type of accreditation the program holds (and on staff educational qualifications, in some cases). The accreditation process replaces the YoungStar rating process.

YoungStar accepts the following accreditations as equivalent to a ***5 Star*** rating:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Association for Early Learning Leaders (formerly the National Association of Child Care Professionals)/National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs
- City of Madison Group and School-Age Accreditation

YoungStar accepts the following accreditations as equivalent to a **4 Star (or a 5 Star\* with education)** rating:

- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
- American Camp Association
- Satellite Family Child Care Accreditation (in the City of Madison)

YoungStar accepts the following accreditations as equivalent to a **4 Star or a 5 Star\*\*** rating, only when additional educational requirements are met:

- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
- AdvancED
- American Montessori Society (AMS)

\* If a program is accredited by COA, NAFCC, or Satellite **AND** the program meets the educational requirements of a 5 Star program, that program would be eligible for a 5 Star rating.

\*\*If a program is accredited by NECPA, AdvancED, or AMS **AND** the program meets the educational requirements of a 4 Star program in their respective YoungStar rating track, that program would be eligible for a 4 Star rating. If a program is accredited by NECPA, AdvancED, or AMS **AND** the program meets the educational requirements of a 5 Star program in their respective YoungStar rating track, that program would be eligible for a 5 Star rating.

YoungStar staff communicate regularly with staff in these accrediting bodies and are satisfied that their accreditation criteria and monitoring practices are rigorous. Currently accepted accreditation bodies require programs to submit annual self-studies and have established unannounced on-site visits. Accreditation is accepted as an alternate pathway to 4 or 5 Stars based on the intensive practices that are necessary to earn accreditation.