

Early Learning Scholarships Program Evaluation Report

**Appendix B:  
Early Learning Scholarship Efficiency and Effectiveness  
Evaluation**

Management Analysis & Development

December 15, 2015



Management  
Analysis  
& Development

**Minnesota Department of  
Education**

**Early Learning Scholarship  
Efficiency and  
Effectiveness Evaluation**

**December 15, 2015**

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Management Analysis & Development is Minnesota government's in-house fee-for-service management consulting group. We are in our 31<sup>st</sup> year of helping public managers increase their organization's effectiveness and efficiency. We provide quality management consultation services to local, regional, state and federal government agencies and public institutions.

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# Executive Summary

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## Background

In 2011, following an initial pilot of a \$2 million scholarship program in ten communities, the Minnesota legislature enacted the Early Learning Scholarship Program<sup>1</sup> to increase access throughout the state to high quality early childhood programs and to support school readiness of three- to five-year old children with the highest needs in terms of income level.

In July 2013, the scholarship program was created with an initial \$23 million allocation per year and made available in 44 counties. In 2015, the legislature appropriated \$104 million for the biennium for the program. In July 2015, the program became available statewide. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) estimates the program will serve 5,700 children for fiscal year 2016, which represents 11 percent of eligible three- and four-year old children in Minnesota.

Scholarships are provided to income-eligible families for their children to attend high quality early care and education programs. The scholarship amount was originally set at \$5,000 per child for a 12-month period, but was increased to \$7,500 beginning July 1, 2015. The MDE administers the scholarship program through nine regional administrators in the 13 Economic Development Regions of the state. Until recently, the scholarships were only available in eligible counties. However, beginning July 1, 2015, they are available statewide. Scholarships can be used in combination with other early learning funding, such as the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).

## Purpose

In the summer of 2015, the MDE contracted with Management Analysis & Development (MAD) to conduct an evaluation of the scholarship program in response to the following legislation:

Chapter 312, Article 20, Section 11, Subd. 5<sup>1</sup> states: The commissioner shall contract with an independent contractor to evaluate the early learning scholarship program. The evaluation must include recommendations regarding the appropriate scholarship amount, efficiency and effectiveness of the administration, and the impact on kindergarten readiness. By January 2016, the commission shall submit a written copy of the evaluation to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees and division with primary jurisdiction over kindergarten through grade 12 education.

This formative evaluation focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration of the scholarships through regional administrators. At the time the evaluation began, the scholarship program had been implemented for one year. It is important to note that the scholarship program is early in its development and, as is common with new programs, staff have and are continuously evaluating processes and polices and making changes as needed to improve the program. The legislation for the scholarship program was passed without specific guidance on the details of implementing and administering the program, allowing the MDE flexibility to make changes as

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<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.165

needed. The evaluation process found many instances of MDE staff responding to a myriad of complex issues related to administering the program. They clearly work hard to administer the program fairly and efficiently. The challenge of conducting an evaluation early on in a program's existence is that pieces are moving rapidly and tweaks are being implemented. The benefit of an early formative evaluation is that staff and stakeholders have the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the program as a whole and understand what is working well and what changes could improve the program. The evaluation was conducted over the period of just over one year. While the evaluation was occurring, the MDE continued to make changes with the intent to improve the program. When those changes relate to findings or recommendations in this report, it is noted.

## Methodology

The evaluation was conducted from September 2014 through August 2015. Quantitative and qualitative data from interviews, surveys, and the MDE was collected and analyzed. The following methods were used to collect data:

- Analysis of scholarship application data;
- Interviews with regional administrators;
- Online survey of all providers with scholarship children;
- Mail survey of a sample of parents with scholarship children;
- Interviews with various stakeholders, including provider trade organizations, state agencies (MDE and DHS), Child Care Aware, and the Minnesota Initiative Foundations.

## Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The scholarship program is still a relatively new program. The value of evaluating the program at this point is to provide timely formative feedback to the MDE so components that are working well can be reinforced and supported, and those that need changing can be assessed. The evaluation provided insight into aspects of the program that are working smoothly, and other aspects that offer opportunities for improvement. This section highlights the main lessons learned from the evaluation. Recommendations developed from this evaluation are included because they support program improvement; however, they are not all cost-neutral and the degree to which some can be implemented may depend on the availability of funds or the ability to raise more funds for the program.

Please note that this evaluation was conducted concurrently with the program being administered. The MDE continued to make changes to the program in an effort of improvement as the evaluation was progressing. Therefore, some recommendations emerged that the MDE was already addressing. In these cases, a note is provided after the recommendation to highlight how the MDE has already addressed the recommendation.

### Areas of Strength

- *The scholarship program is reaching children from diverse families.*  
Application data shows that a higher percentage of children receiving scholarships are from communities of color compared to children of the same age statewide. In addition, some families receiving scholarships are from households whose primary language is a language other than English. The main languages other than English that these families speak include

Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. (In addition to English, MDE provides the scholarship application in these three languages).

- ***Providers generally report they have good relationships with their regional administrators.***  
Providers reported they receive timely and accurate information from their regional administrators. In addition, they said Pathway II applications are approved in a timely fashion. In general, most regional administrators understand the invoicing and payment processes and are paid on time.
- ***Families are either already attending their program of choice or find an eligible program quickly.***  
About one-third of the parents surveyed said they were already attending a program when they applied for a scholarship. Half of the parents said they found a program in less than one month, and only five percent said it took them more than two months.
- ***Children are attending the program their parents wanted when they applied.***  
Nearly all (95%) of the parents indicated their children are attending the program of their choice.
- ***Stakeholders indicated they see improvements in the program in the second year.***  
Providers and stakeholders expressed appreciation for the many changes the MDE has made to the program in its second year. They see improvement and are thankful for those changes.

## **Outreach**

- ***Lesson: Families' main source of scholarship information is their provider.***  
Most of the interviewees and survey respondents reported parents most commonly learn about scholarships through their provider. Regional administrators are charged with the main responsibility for conducting outreach in their regions and are supported by the MDE as needed. However, only some regional administrators are directly serving as the primary resource to parents. In most regions, the providers are the main information source on scholarships for parents, and parents have limited, if any, knowledge about the regional administrator. The parent survey results indicated many parents did not know there was a regional administrator they could contact for assistance. In light of providers functioning as the most common information source for scholarships in many regions, some regional administrators expressed concern that not all providers have a thorough understanding of the scholarships and may be providing incorrect information to parents in some cases.
1. **Recommendation:** Regional administrators should strengthen their outreach processes, particularly with providers in their region. The focus of this work should be to ensure that accurate information is reaching the providers. Regional administrators should also contact providers who assist families to complete their applications in the event that there are errors in the application. This would help educate providers about the program. The MDE should work

with regional administrators on developing methods for conducting this outreach in their regions.

## Communication

- *Lesson: Regional administrators and providers understand the MDE needs time to assess questions and issues about the program, but they also struggle with needing more timely responses from the MDE on scholarship questions.*

The scholarship program is new and a significantly large program to implement in such a short period. The MDE has had to work quickly to resolve issues as the program is running. As with any new program, kinks must be worked out and unanticipated questions addressed. In the interviews and surveys, regional administrators and providers were sensitive to the demands MDE staff have been under in working through the implementation of the program and addressing issues as they arise. They acknowledged that in many cases the MDE responds quickly. However, many interviewees and survey respondents also reported they struggle with the time it can take the MDE to respond to their more complicated questions. They understand that often the MDE's answers to their questions have policy and process implications so they need to examine their responses. A tension exists for regional administrators when they need a quick response.

2. **Recommendation:** The MDE should continue to improve response times to regional administrators.
- *Lesson: The MDE communicates with regional administrators much useful information, but regional administrators find there are too many communications and they are not organized by a system. When they need specific information, they struggle to find it.*
3. **Recommendation:** The MDE should develop a process to communicate information in a way that is easily accessible to regional administrators and can be kept up to date. One example is to develop a portal that regional administrators have access to and can be updated on a scheduled timeline.

## Scholarship Materials/Application

- *Lesson: Scholarship materials, including the application, are not easy for some parents to access.*

Although most providers surveyed reported parents are able to easily access scholarship materials, one-quarter of providers indicated that scholarship materials are not easy to access. In addition, about one-third of the parents reported they needed assistance from their provider to complete the application. Although these proportions may seem low, it warrants concern about the general ease of accessing the materials and completing the application. The results indicate that this is more likely to be an issue in the Metro area (seven county area), rather than Greater Minnesota. Language is likely a common barrier to completing the application. Over the life of the program, the MDE has worked with regional administrators to refine the

scholarship materials and application. As expected, when implementing a new program, the materials have gone through iterations in an effort to continuously improve the final products.

- ***Lesson: The income eligibility section of the application is particularly challenging for parents to complete accurately.***

Providers, regional administrators, and stakeholders indicated the income eligibility section creates the most problems for parents to complete. Some regional administrators reported that a large percentage of their time is spent tracking down missing or inaccurate information in this section of the application. Parents are frequently not sure what documentation to attach. By nature, the process to verify income can be onerous and complicated. The MDE is limited in their ability to simplify this section of the application while also collecting the information necessary to verify income. Therefore, a tension exist between simplifying this section and meeting requirements for income verification. This tension is common for programs requiring income verification; it is challenging and complex.

4. **Recommendation:** The MDE should continue their work finding areas where the scholarship materials and application can be simplified

*Note: The MDE has made many changes to the applications since the first version based on feedback from regional administrators and providers. Some changes occurred after providers were surveyed in the fall of 2014. Changes included translation of applications, including renewal and supplemental information for both Pathways, into Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. The MDE has also shortened the application by requesting only the information required to award scholarships and legal information and consent language required by data practices. The number of pages has been reduced from ten in the original application to five in the current version.*

5. **Recommendation:** The MDE should explore the benefits and costs of developing a system for applications to be completed and submitted online.

- ***Lesson: The timing of the release of the scholarship application and materials creates challenges for regional administrators and providers. However, the MDE's timing for releasing scholarship materials is constrained by the timing of the legislative session.***

The majority of providers, stakeholders, and regional administrators interviewed and surveyed strongly indicated the timing of distribution of the scholarship application and materials creates significant challenges for them. The timing affects the number of families that can be reached, the method of reaching them, and provider budgeting and planning. The timing has created staffing problems as well as problems communicating with parents. For context, since the scholarship program was created, there have been two additional legislative sessions. Each session could have changed policy language and both added funding, expanding the geographic scope of early learning scholarships. The timing of the end of the legislative sessions impeded updating materials in a timely enough fashion to be available prior to the July 1 start of a new fiscal year.

- 6. Recommendation:** The MDE should continue their work exploring options for releasing the applications and outreach materials earlier and use experience from each year to develop applications and materials that are less dependent on legislative changes.

### Invoicing/Billing

- **Lesson: Providers need more detailed information on invoices so they can track billing per child.** The regional administrators do not provide invoice information at the per child level so providers often struggle to reconcile their records with the invoice. This makes it difficult to track the balance for each child.
- 7. Recommendation:** The MDE should ensure the Early Learning Scholarship Administration System (ELSA) is capable of accommodating invoicing that reports out at the per child level.

*Note: The MDE developed ELSA with the capability to report out at the per child level. ELSA was distributed to regional administrators in January 2015.*

- **Lesson: Providers appreciate flexibility in invoicing.** Although most regional administrators reported offering billing schedules other than monthly, some stakeholders in Greater Minnesota emphasized the importance of this flexibility to small providers in particular.
- 8. Recommendation:** Regional administrators should review their billing schedule to assess if they can increase flexibility, within reason.
- **Lesson: Regional administrators are challenged by forecasting scholarship funds.** The system of awarding the full scholarship amount is frustrating to many regional administrators because it ties up money that may not be spent and that could potentially fund more children. No regional administrator has a well-developed system for balancing awards versus actual spending. Most are managing it on a case-by-case basis, tracking balances monthly and assessing how much risk their own organization can take on while also tracking the waitlist. This was a major issue for most regional administrators in terms of efficiency.
- 9. Recommendation:** The MDE should work with the regional administrators to develop a system or guidelines for planning and forecasting scholarship funds more formally to ensure the most children are able to access the scholarships.

*Note: The MDE provided forecasting guidance in the latest version of the regional administrator's manual which is in draft form to be finalized and made available January 2016.*

- **Lesson: Regional administrators want more training on how to verify income and identify fraud on applications and provider claims.**
- 10. Recommendation:** The MDE should develop and provide training for regional administrators on verifying income and identifying fraud.

## Data Issues

- **Lesson: *The Parent Aware renewal data does not include information on which providers have scholarship children.***

This was a major concern among staff at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) in terms of how it impacts their ability to specifically reach out to scholarship providers with expiring ratings. The concern is that some scholarship providers may not understand that their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve. If a provider with scholarship children loses their Parent Aware rating, the family must find another provider. There are two databases: one maintained by the DHS that tracks the Parent Aware facilities, and the other maintained by the MDE that tracks the scholarship children. The DHS has a system in place for alerting all Parent Aware providers well in advance as their rating nears expiration. However, the Parent Aware database does not track which providers have scholarship children due to data privacy laws; therefore, they are not able to specifically reach out to scholarship providers in addition to the general notice they receive.

- 11. Recommendation:** The MDE and DHS should work together within data practice standards to identify improvements in their systems and messaging to ensure scholarship providers are communicated with when their ratings are expiring.
- 12. Recommendation:** The MDE should develop a system for notifying regional administrators as scholarship providers in their region are approaching their Parent Aware renewal date. Based on this system, regional administrators should contact each scholarship provider with expiring Parent Aware ratings directly to ensure they are aware that their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve.
- 13. Recommendation:** Regional administrators should ensure scholarship providers are, in general, aware that their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve.

- **Lesson: *Regional administrators want a database that will manage all the scholarship information required to run the program and produce required reports.***

*Note: ELSA (made available to regional administrators in January 2015) has the capability to report at the child and program levels. In addition, ELSA has filter and sort options specifically for reporting scholarship information.*

- 14. Recommendation:** As ELSA is made available to regional administrators, the MDE should ensure there is sufficient training for regional administrators.

*Note: The MDE has provided training at each regional administrator meeting since January 2015 and conducted frequent webinars for all ELSA users.*

- 15. Recommendation:** The MDE should establish a system to gather feedback on ELSA from regional administrators and consider making changes based on that feedback.

*Note: The MDE has actively sought feedback on ELSA at quarterly meetings. In addition, the MDE added an ELSA project manager in December 2014 who is responsible for coordinating user experience with the development of software timelines, protocol, and capabilities.*

## **Parent Aware**

- **Lesson: *Small childcare providers in less populated areas may be particularly challenged with maintaining their Parent Aware rating or may be less motivated to pursue a rating given their staffing challenges.***

Given the lack of providers in some areas of Minnesota, it will be important for the MDE to understand exactly how the Parent Aware rating system is incentivizing small childcare providers in Greater Minnesota to participate in Parent Aware and scholarships.

16. **Recommendation:** The MDE should develop a plan with Parent Aware for gathering input from small childcare centers and family providers in Greater Minnesota to learn how the Parent Aware program is affecting them.

- **Lesson: *There is confusion about which organization needs to have a Parent Aware rating when in a provider partnership.***

Some providers may partner with other organizations to provide care. The stakeholders who raised this issue were concerned about how it will affect the efforts already underway for aligning programs, especially in Greater Minnesota, where there has been a considerable effort in aligning programs. The MDE has developed and communicated guidelines to handle these situations; however, some confusion remains.

17. **Recommendation:** The MDE should work with the DHS to ensure providers are aware of and understand Parent Aware rating within partnerships.

## **Pathway II**

- **Lesson: *Regional administrators need more training and communication on Pathway II.***

Regional administrators expressed difficulties with administering Pathway II. Their main concern was they do not have the answers to many of the questions providers ask them.

Regional administrators are instructed to direct these questions to the MDE. However, regional administrators find that providers often contact them for assistance, rather than the MDE. They also perceive that when the MDE does work directly with a provider or with other regional administrators to clarify an issue, the MDE often does not communicate the resolution to the regional administrators.

18. **Recommendation:** When working through Pathway II issues, the MDE should communicate the issue and the resolution with regional administrators so information is consistent and the regional administrators are informed when they do get Pathway II calls.

# Background

## Early Learning Scholarship Program Summary

In 2011, following an initial pilot of a \$2 million scholarship program in ten communities, the Minnesota legislature enacted the Early Learning Scholarship Program<sup>2</sup> to increase access throughout the state to high quality early childhood programs and to support school readiness of three- to five-year old children with the highest needs in terms of income level.

In July 2013, the scholarship program was created with an initial \$23 million allocation per year and made available in 44 counties. In 2015, the legislature appropriated \$104 million for the biennium for the program. In July 2015, the program became available statewide. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) estimates the program will serve 5,700 children for fiscal year 2016, which represents 11 percent of eligible three- and four-year old children in Minnesota.

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## Scholarship Requirements

A child must meet the following requirements to qualify for a scholarship:

1. A child meets income requirements by:
  - A. Participation in one of the following programs:
    - Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
    - Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
    - Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP)
    - Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - Food Distribution Program on Indian reservations
    - Food Support (SNAP)
    - Head Start
    - Foster Care
  - B. Or the family's income must be equal to or less than 185% of the federal poverty level in the current calendar year.
2. The child meets one or more of the following criteria:
  - A. The child must be age three or four as of September 1 of the current year and not yet eligible for kindergarten.

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<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.165

- B. The child is between the ages of zero and five of a parent under age 21 who is pursuing a high school or general education equivalency diploma and meets the income eligibility guidelines.
  - C. The child is a sibling between the ages of zero and five of a child who has been awarded a scholarship and attends the same childcare program.
3. The family must choose a provider that participates in Parent Aware, Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System.

### **Parent Aware Rating**

Parent Aware is a rating tool designed to establish standards for quality childcare. Parent Aware provides ratings (one to four stars) based on criteria for each star level. Providers must renew with Parent Aware every two years, meeting criteria established for the star rating they are seeking. Scholarship may only be used at Parent Aware rated providers. Beginning in July 2016, scholarships may only be used at three- or four-star-rated providers. Parent Aware maintains a searchable database of rated providers on their website that parents can access.

### **Scholarship Pathways**

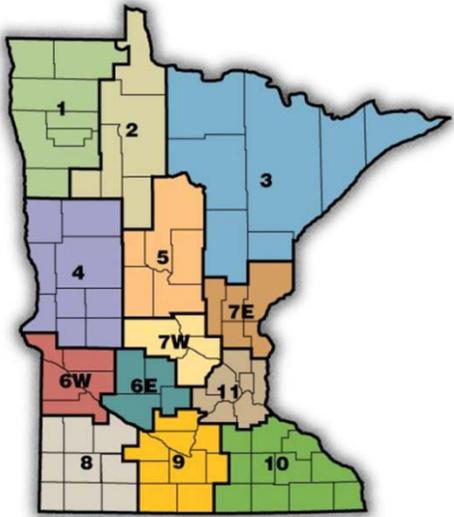
The scholarship can be accessed through one of two pathways:

- **Early Learning Scholarships Pathway I**  
Pathway I scholarships are awarded directly to families who meet eligibility requirements. Pathway I scholarship funds are paid to the early childhood provider the family chooses. The provider must participate in the Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System and may include Head Start, school district prekindergarten and preschool programs, and childcare programs. Pathway I scholarships are portable so families can change providers and take the scholarship with them. As of July 1, 2016, the program must have and maintain a three- or four-star Parent Aware rating in order to continue to receive scholarships. Until then, a provider can have a one- or two-star rating; however, they receive less than the full scholarship amount (up to \$4,000).
- **Early Learning Scholarships Pathway II**  
Pathway II scholarships are awarded to families through an eligible four-star Parent Aware-rated program. These include Head Start, school district prekindergarten and preschool programs, and childcare programs. Pathway II scholarships are not portable and stay with the provider.

### **Regional Administrators**

Nine regional administrators administer scholarships through the 13 Economic Development Regions of the state. Figure 1 contains a map that illustrates these regions. Some regional administrators administer the program for two regions. The following regions are combined: regions 3 and 11, regions 6E and 6W, and regions 9 and 10. Regional administrators are selected by the MDE based on a competitive process.

**Figure 1: Economic Developments Regions of Minnesota**



Regional administrators are charged with the following (excerpt pulled from the Request for Proposal of Regional Administrators, 2013):

- 1) Follow the policies and procedures as provided by MDE in the scholarship implementation manual found here: [website address was provided here but is no longer live].
- 2) Create an outreach plan, in coordination with the eligible counties, to identify potential families with children eligible for Early Learning Scholarships. Outreach plans must include specific strategies for reaching parents under age 21, culturally and linguistically diverse families, and all types of early childhood programs that may be eligible to receive Early Learning Scholarships.
- 3) Disseminate and customize marketing materials in coordination with MDE.
- 4) Reach the most at-risk children and families through connections with home visits, local school districts, resource and referral agencies, providers of early care and education, Minnesota Family Investment Program offices, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, Child Care Assistance Program offices, Community Action Programs, employment service providers, food shelves, clinics, libraries and other local community agencies.
- 5) Identify a process to ensure that all eligible communities in the Region receive a distribution of scholarships.
- 6) Assist families through the process of accessing Early Learning Scholarships including:
  - a. Inform potential families about the Early Learning Scholarships, its benefits and requirements;
  - b. Assist applicants in completing applications for Early Learning Scholarships, using the standard application form to be developed by MDE;
  - c. Verify applicants' eligibility, under the process determined by MDE; and inform applicants of their Early Learning Scholarship award and assist families in selecting and enrolling in an eligible Parent Aware early childhood program. This includes providing families with information about Pathway I and Pathway II Early Learning Scholarships.
- 7) Develop an internal process for verifying applicant eligibility that ensures the integrity of the program.
- 8) Work collaboratively with a variety of early childhood programs to ensure a successful working relationship.

- 9) *Develop a process for making payments to programs participating in Parent Aware that will receive funds from Pathway I and Pathway II Early Learning Scholarships.*
- 10) *Collect and maintain records of applicants and early childhood program payments for monitoring efforts in order to submit data to MDE on a schedule to be determined by MDE.*
- 11) *Maintain records of approved and not approved family scholarship applications for Pathway I, approval notification documentation, and expenditures charged against each scholarship. Grantees will work with MDE in the transition to a state-wide database for the Early Learning Scholarship Program starting in FY2015.*
- 12) *Ensure compliance with data privacy practices as required by MDE.*
- 13) *Establish agreements with school districts in the areas where Pathway I and Pathway II Early Learning Scholarships are available in order to ensure that all children with Pathway I and Pathway II Scholarships are reported to MDE through the state Early Education Student (EE Student) System. These agreements must be in place if the applicant is a recipient of this grant award. This requirement will likely require a financial relationship with the school district/s. Administrators should plan to reimburse school districts approximately \$50 per Pathway I and Pathway II Scholarship available for data reporting to MDE through the EE Student System. Applicants should allocate those funds to the 305 budget line item when completing the budget. This allocation would be a portion of the 8% administrative grant award funds. A listing of the total number of Pathway II Scholarships per region will be available on MDE's Early Learning Scholarship site will be available by going to MDE's Early Learning Services site: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/index.html> after July 25, 2013. MDE will notify each grantee regional administrator of the number of Pathway II Early Learning Scholarships available to families through programs in their region and the dollar amount associated with the award.*
- 14) *Ensure children that receive an Early Learning Scholarship complete a developmental screening within 90 days of first attending an eligible early childhood program. A child who has not completed Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening (Early Childhood or Preschool Screening) under Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.16 to 121A. 19, and who receives a scholarship must complete the screening within 90 calendar days of first attending an eligible program. If a child is currently attending an eligible program when they receive a scholarship, the child must complete the screening within 90 calendar days of receiving the scholarship award.*
- 15) *Participate in all evaluation requirements set forth by the state. The state is committed to funding services that produce a measurable result for children and families. MDE will contract with an independent contractor to evaluate the Early Learning Scholarship Program. The evaluation will include recommendations regarding the appropriate scholarship amount, efficiency, and effectiveness of the administration, and impact on kindergarten readiness.*
- 16) *Develop an internal process for ensuring that grant activities are completed efficiently and effectively and performance measures are achieved.*
- 17) *Track and report the number and amount of Pathway I and Pathway II Scholarships spent in a manner and timeline as determined by MDE.*
- 18) *Make payments to and track all Pathway II expenditures for the designated Pathway II programs in their region. MDE will be providing fiscal guidance to programs through the application process for budgets for Pathway II. Eligible Pathway II programs will be submitting a plan and budget to MDE for review.*

*MDE will notify the administrators within a Region of the early learning programs that have been designated as a Pathway II program.*

## **Purpose of Evaluation**

In the summer of 2014, the MDE contracted with Management Analysis & Development (MAD) to conduct an evaluation of the scholarship program in response to the following legislation:

Chapter 312, Article 20, Section 11, Subd. 5<sup>1</sup> states: The commissioner shall contract with an independent contractor to evaluate the early learning scholarship program. The evaluation must include recommendations regarding the appropriate scholarship amount, efficiency and effectiveness of the administration, and the impact on kindergarten readiness. By January 2016, the commission shall submit a written copy of the evaluation to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees and division with primary jurisdiction over kindergarten through grade 12 education.

This formative evaluation focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration of the scholarships through the regional administrators. At the time the evaluation began, the scholarship program had been implemented for one year. It is important to note that the scholarship program is early in its development and, as is common with new programs, staff have and are continuously evaluating processes and policies and making changes as needed to improve the program. The legislation for the scholarship program was passed without specific guidance on the details of implementing and administering the program, allowing the MDE flexibility to make changes as needed. The evaluation process found many instances of MDE staff responding to a myriad of complex issues related to administering the program. They clearly work hard to administer the program fairly and efficiently. The challenge of conducting an evaluation early on in a program's existence is that pieces are moving rapidly and tweaks are being implemented. The benefit of an early formative evaluation is that staff and stakeholders have the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the program as a whole and understand what is working well and what changes could improve the program. The evaluation was conducted over the period of just over one year. While the evaluation was occurring, the MDE continued to make changes with the intent to improve the program. When those changes relate to findings or recommendations in this report, it is noted.

## Profile of Scholarship Children

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In the spring of 2015, the MDE provided MAD with data collected on the applications of children who had received a scholarship before April 15, 2015 and whose parents had consented to participate in evaluation activities. Note that this timeframe overlaps two fiscal years. The total number of children in the dataset was 8,689. MAD analyzed the data by demographic factors to illustrate whom the scholarship program is serving. See Appendix A for a copy of the application.

Overall, the distribution of children receiving a scholarship by region was nearly identical to the distribution of funds by region for the program. Scholarships were evenly split by gender. Forty percent of the children (3,488) received Pathway I scholarships and 60 percent (5,201) received Pathway II.

### Application Data Highlights

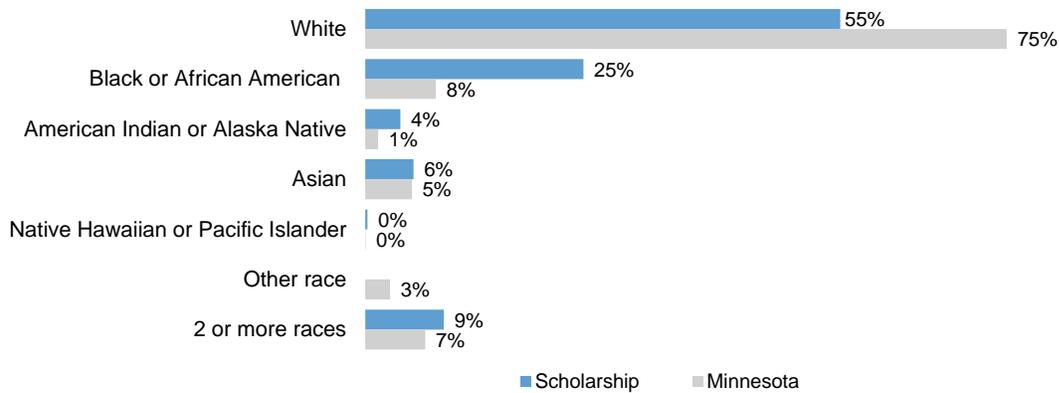
- A higher percentage of children receiving scholarships are from communities of color compared to same age children statewide.
- A higher percentage of scholarship children are Hispanic than the comparable age group statewide.
- Some families are from non-English-speaking households. The most common non-English languages of scholarship children were Spanish and Somali.
- Less than one-fifth of scholarship primary parents had a college degree (two- or four-year) and 44 percent had a high school degree or less.
- The majority of primary parents had a full- or part-time job at the time they completed the scholarship application.
- Most parents were income qualified for scholarship through participation in other assistance programs.
- In terms of type of program, scholarship children are most likely to attend a school-based program (50%) or a childcare center (30%).

### Race/Ethnicity

Data on race and ethnicity were available for 82 percent of the scholarship children. The remaining 18 percent did not specify their race on their application. Of all the scholarship children, 44 percent were non-White or more than two races and just over half (55%) were White. Of the nine percent who were two or more races, the majority were White and Black or African American (66%) and 12 percent were American Indian and White. (In charts throughout this report, “n” is the total number of people or responses in the chart on which the percentages are based. For example, in Chart 1 below, “n” is the total number of children in the scholarship application data who reported their race.)

**Chart 1: Scholarship Children by Race Compared to Minnesota Children\***

(n=7164)



\* American Community Survey (ACS) 2013 estimates of children under five years of age.

In terms of race by region, the majority of White (75%) and American Indian children (73%) were in Greater Minnesota. The majority of children who were Black, Asian, and those of two or more races were in the Metro area<sup>3</sup> (85%, 86%, and 63% respectively). When looking at the percentage breakdown by race of the scholarship children who identified race in Greater Minnesota, 21 percent were non-White. When looking at the same percentage breakdown for the Metro Area, 71 percent were non-White. The racial breakdown within each Pathway was very similar between Pathway I and Pathway II.

Fifteen percent of the scholarship children were Hispanic compared to nine percent of the state population of children under the age of five as estimated by the 2013 American Community Survey. Of those Hispanic scholarship children, the majority (70%) were in Pathway II programs.

**Language at Home**

Data on primary language spoken at home were missing for 23 percent of the scholarship children. An analysis of the missing information by region revealed that the Metro area comprised a disproportionate amount of these missing data. Therefore, the information in this section may understate the number of children from homes where English is not the primary language. The available data provided important insights, but should be viewed with this missing information in mind.

After English, Spanish was the language most often spoken at home, with 10 percent of the children from a Spanish-speaking household. Somali was the next most frequent language spoken, with three percent of children from Somali speaking households. The scholarship application is currently available in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report, the “Metro area” is defined as the seven county Metro area.

**Table 1: scholarship Children's Language Spoken at Home**

	# of scholarship children	% of scholarship children
English	5,423	82%
Spanish	662	10%
Somali	201	3%
Hmong	96	1%
Karen	59	1%
Oromo	41	1%
Arabic	22	0%
Amharic	12	0%
Other	134	2%
Total	6,650	100%

The majority of children from English-speaking households were in Greater Minnesota (64%) compared to those in the Metro area (36%). Children from Spanish-speaking households were more often in the Metro area (73%) than Greater Minnesota (27%). Children from Somali-speaking households were more evenly dispersed geographically, with 44 percent in Greater Minnesota and 56 percent in the Metro area.

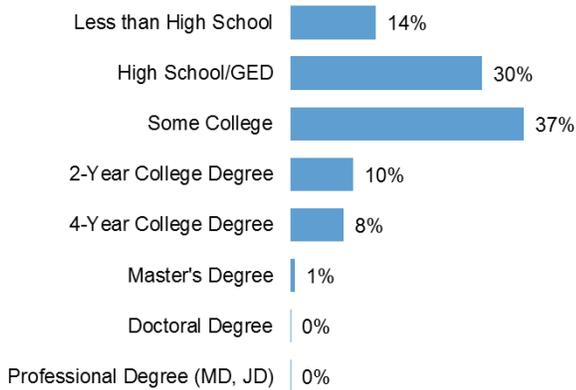
Children from homes where English is not the primary language were more likely to receive a Pathway II scholarship than a Pathway I scholarship. Slightly more than half (52%) of children from English-speaking households received a Pathway I scholarship.

### **Education of Parent/Guardian**

On the application, each family must identify a primary parent or guardian. Forty-four percent of the scholarship primary parents had less than a college degree (30% of these parents completed high school and 14% did not). Over one-third (37%) had completed some college but not a full degree. Eighteen percent of the parents completed either a two- or four-year college degree. There was little variation by geography.

**Chart 2: Education Level of Primary Parent**

n=7761



**Work Status of Primary Parent/Guardian**

Two-thirds (67%) of the primary parents were employed either full- or part-time when they applied for the scholarship.

**Chart 3: Work Status of Primary Parent**

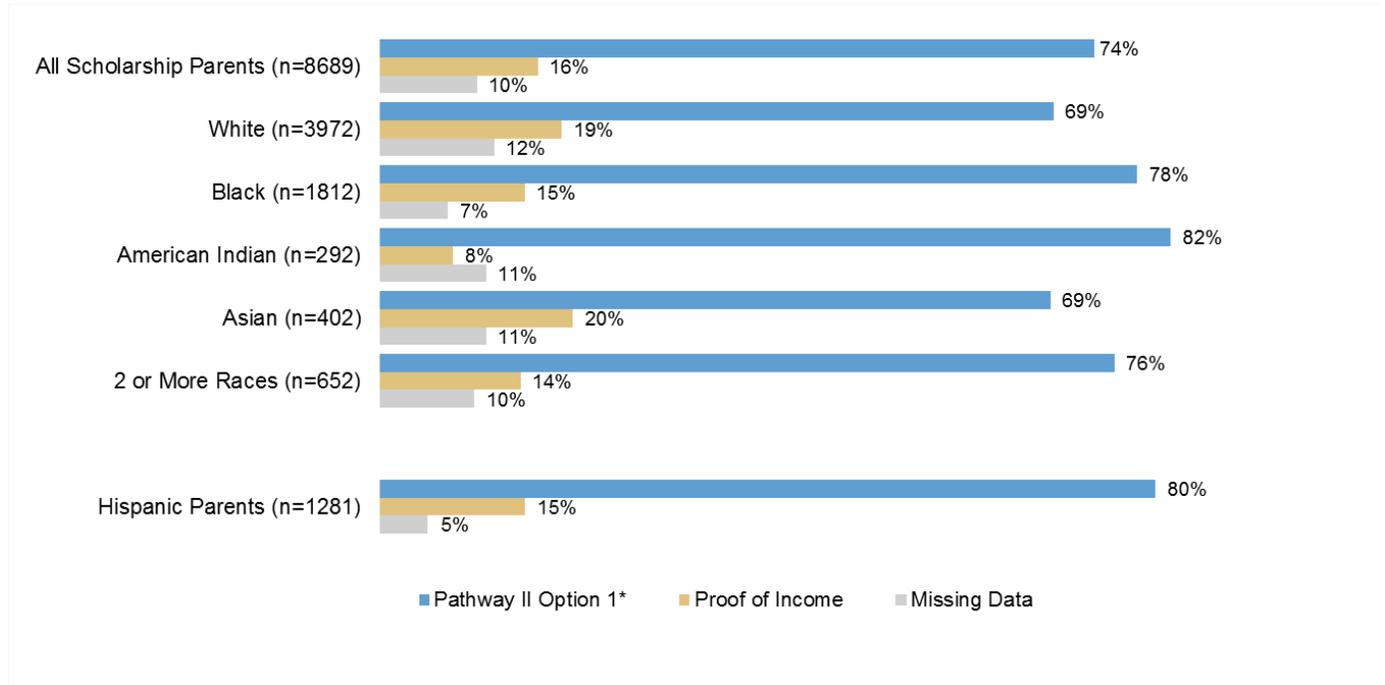
n=7544



**Income Qualification**

The application includes a section for verifying income. Most family income (74%) was verified for income eligibility through public programs the families already participated in, such as the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Head Start, foster care, Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This method of verification is called Option 1. The other 26 percent of the families proved their income by submitting documents such as tax returns to regional administrators. In terms of ethnicity, Hispanic families had a higher rate of income verification through other programs than scholarship families overall (80% versus 74%).

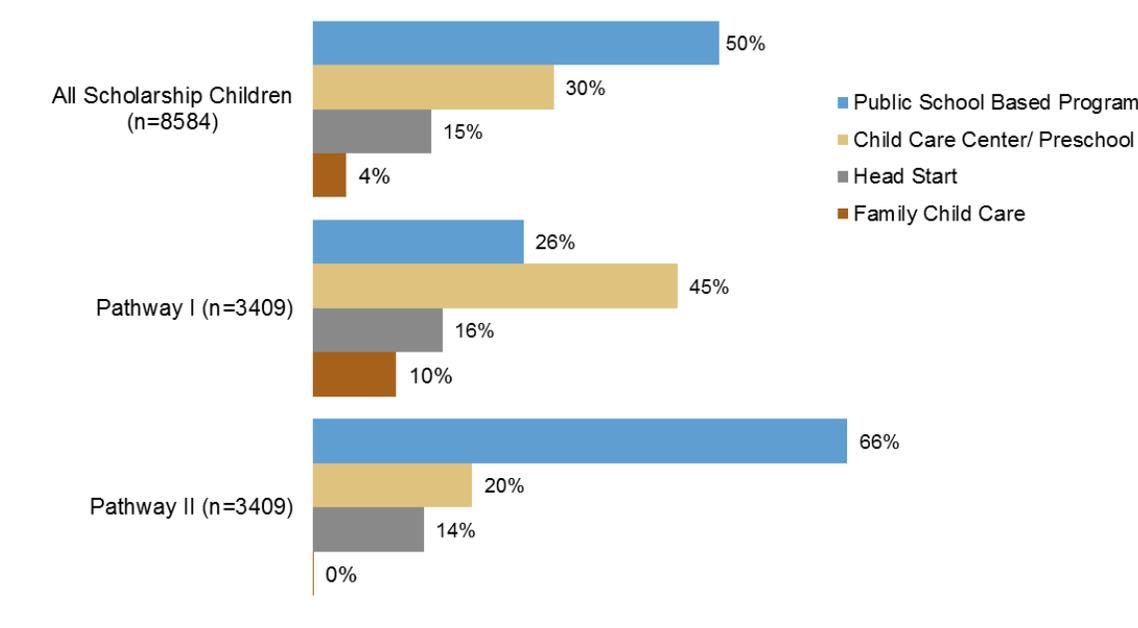
**Chart 4: Income Qualification Method by Race and Ethnicity**



**Program Type**

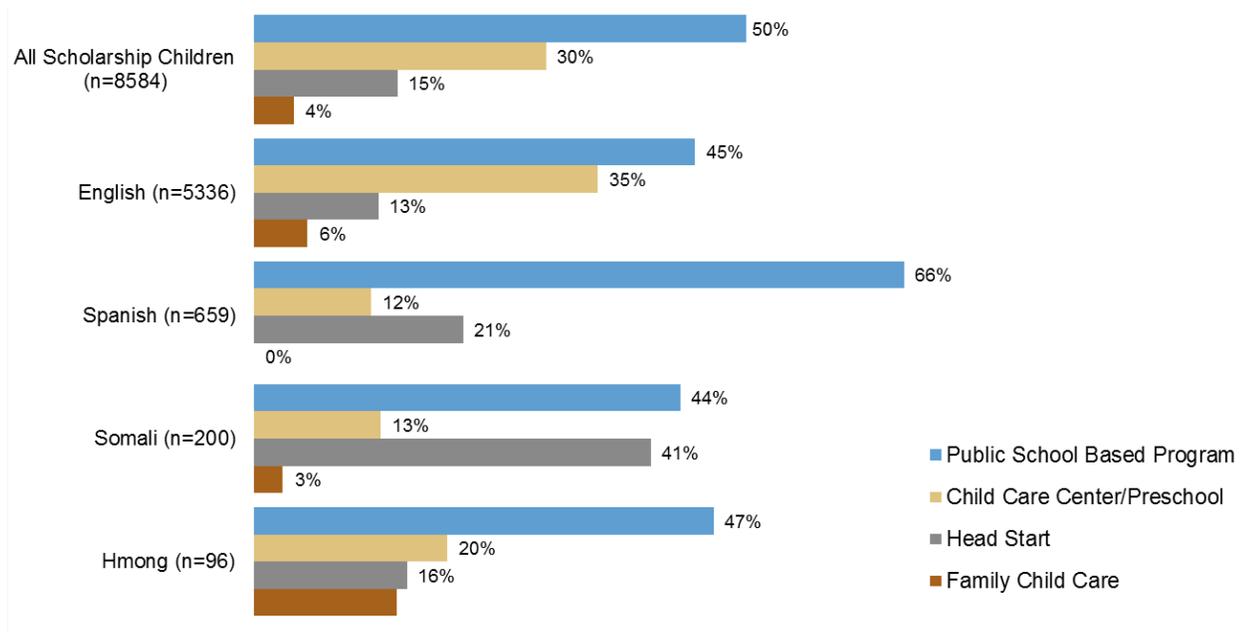
Overall, half of the scholarship children attended public school-based childcare programs and 30 percent attended childcare center programs. Fifteen percent of the children participated in Head Start programs. Family childcare was the least attended program type, with only four percent of children. Pathway I children were most likely to attend a childcare center program (45% of Pathway I children), and one-quarter (26%) attended a public school based program. Pathway II children were the most likely to attend a public school based program (66% of Pathway II children).

**Chart 5: Program Type by Pathway**



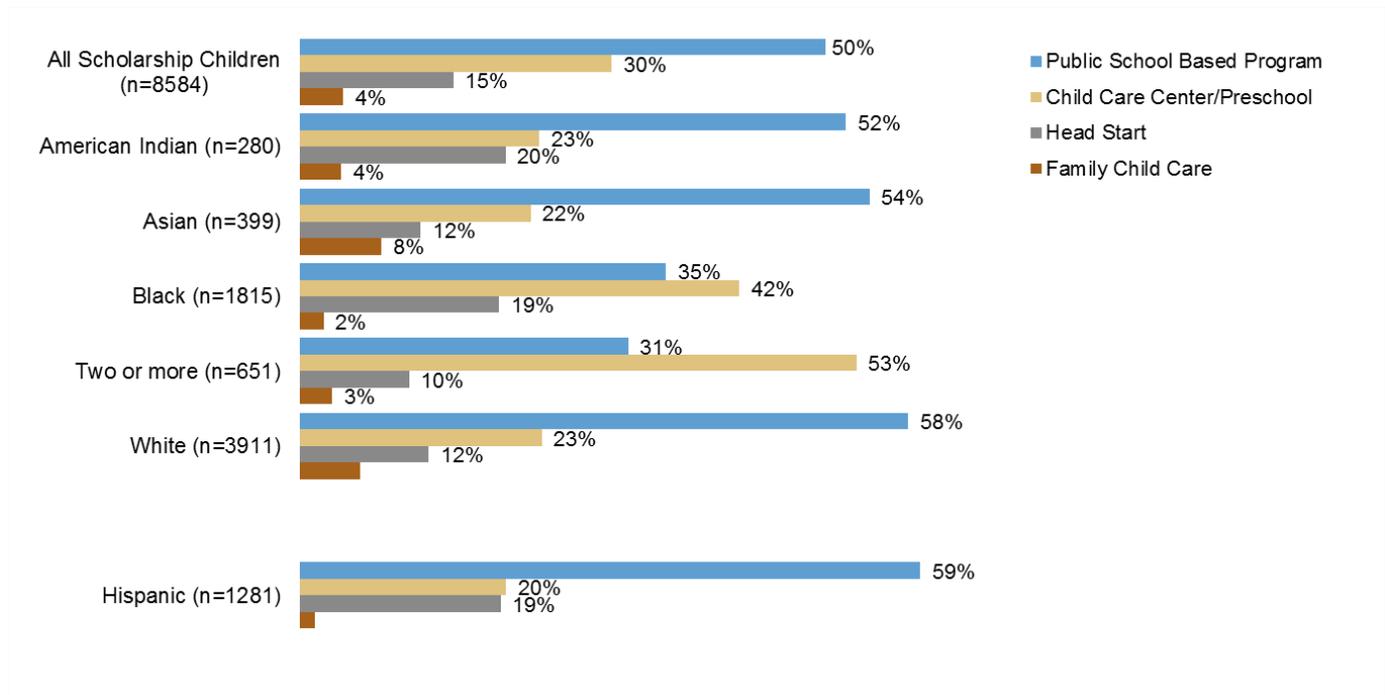
Looking at program type by primary language at home revealed some differences between groups. Children from homes where Spanish is the primary language were the most likely group to attend a public school-based program (66%). Children from Hmong-speaking households were the most likely to attend family childcare (15%). Children from Somali-speaking households had the highest proportion of children attending Head Start (41%).

**Chart 6: Program Type by Primary Language**



American Indian, Asian, and White children were more likely to attend public school-based programs than Black or African American children or those identifying with two or more races, who were more likely to attend childcare center programs.

**Chart 7: Program Type by Race and Ethnicity**



**Teen Parent Households**

Ninety-four of the scholarship children were from teen parent households (1% of all scholarship children). Most of these children (64%) were in the Metro area. They predominately had Pathway I scholarships (87%) and attended childcare center programs (54%). Twenty percent of these children attended Head Start, 14 percent attended public school based programs, and 11 percent attended family childcare.

## Summary of Experiences with the Scholarship

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### Regional Administrators' Experience

In the fall of 2014, MAD interviewed all of the Early Learning regional administrators by phone. One or two staff from each region were interviewed, for a total of 16 interviewees. Some regional administrators oversee multiple regions and include regions 9 and 10, regions 6E and 6W, and regions 3 and 11. Interviews lasted from one to two hours. (See appendix A for interview questions.) This section summarizes the information gathered from those interviews.

#### Regional Administrator Interviews Highlights

- Regional administrators were positive about the program. There was a general sense that it is a new program and any challenges will be resolved with time and more experience.
- Most regional administrators indicated the scholarship materials from the MDE are helpful but need more detail, specifically more information on income eligibility. They also said that the materials should be developed and released on a schedule more consistent with when they conduct their outreach.
- Some regions in Greater Minnesota described their challenges with the lack of Parent Aware-rated providers, or any providers at all, in their region.
- Providers in their regions deliver most of the application assistance to parents.
- Most regional administrators reported a substantial amount of their time is spent on tracking down missing or incorrectly entered information once the application is submitted. The sections they reported as being the most problematic are income eligibility, the number of children in the household, and the program their child is enrolled in currently.
- Regional administrators are all struggling to balance funds without leaving any unspent or overcommitted. Forecasting award amounts is a major challenge for them.
- Regional administrators reported good communication with providers in general.
- Regional administrators have varying degrees of contact with families. Some regional administrators communicate mostly with providers and the providers communicate with families. Some regional administrators reported more direct contact with families. Some regional administrators expressed concern over the level that some parents are educated about the scholarship program. They indicated some providers have misinformation about scholarships and pass that misinformation on to parents.
- Regional administrators reported most providers understand the invoicing/billing processes after an initial learning curve.
- Malfeasance in invoicing is rare according to the regional administrators.
- Regional administrators had varying opinions about the eight percent administration fee. Many regional administrators specifically had concerns about their ability to work with the eight percent fee as the program grows.
- Regional administrators offered several suggestions for improving the scholarship program including:
  - Consolidated communication from the MDE;
  - A uniform database that will manage all data required to run the scholarship program; and
  - Clarification on regional administrators' role in Pathway II.

*The following provides detailed information supporting the highlights above.*

### **Strengths of scholarship**

Regional administrators were positive about the program. There was a general sense that it is a new program and any challenges will be resolved with time and more experience. When asked to list the strengths of the scholarships, regional administrators said that they:

- Give families a choice;
- Help large numbers of children;
- Provide an opportunity to engage parents;
- Change the way families live;
- Promote professionalism and quality in providers;
- Help families stay in high quality early child care and education programs; and
- Fit the needs of families.

### **Marketing and outreach**

#### **MDE materials**

The MDE provides regions with marketing materials for the scholarships. The expectation for regional administrators as described in the request for proposals specifies that they are expected to distribute these materials and may customize them. Most regional administrators reported the materials from the MDE did not include enough detail and have not been released early enough to be useful.

Some regional administrators find the materials useful and modify them to meet their needs. Some regional administrators said more information about eligibility and information specific to the region should be included. Several regional administrators said they received the MDE flier in the fall and had already made most of their awards.

#### **Outreach efforts**

A tension exists for many regional administrators who want to do more outreach but at the same time know they do not have enough scholarships to offer all the families who are already applying. One regional administrator talked about not wanting to instill false hope in the families applying and that the need far exceeds the supply of scholarship funds in their region. Another regional administrator said providers are doing most of the outreach without the regional administrators' involvement.

In terms of reaching culturally and linguistically diverse families, most regional administrators are partnering with other community-based organizations to conduct outreach. Most often, they mentioned reaching out to these families through Head Start, public health partners, social service partners, or other groups serving diverse communities.

Most regional administrators reported having a distribution plan to ensure scholarships are being distributed to all counties. They have systems in place to check the distribution geographically. Regional administrators in two Greater Minnesota regions expressed frustration over the lack of any childcare providers in some counties. One regional administrator expressed feeling conflicted over holding funds for a county with few provider options while children in other counties are on the waitlist. This regional administrator also highlighted a timing issue concerning the six-month lag in

obtaining a Parent Aware rating when the providers in the region are not yet rated. They would like to see this lag time shortened in these counties so scholarship scholarships can be implemented more quickly.

### **Application**

#### **Assistance completing the scholarship application**

Regional administrators reported that the amount of assistance families need completing the scholarship application and their time spent on this activity varied greatly. Four regional administrators indicated they spend minimal time assisting families with their applications and that providers are conducting the bulk of the work. The rest of the regional administrators said anywhere from 25 to 60 percent of families need assistance.

Regional administrators reported wide variation in the amount of time they spent tracking down missing information on incomplete applications. One regional administrator said 30 percent of applications in her region arrive with incomplete income eligibility information. One regional administrator reported 80 percent of her time was spent finding missing documentation in July and August, when the bulk of the applications were submitted. In contrast, two other regional administrators said the providers track down all the missing information so applications arrive completed.

Most regional administrators indicated two sections of the application were difficult for parents to complete correctly. The section of the application requiring the most assistance was income eligibility. Regional administrators commented that the income eligibility page is complex and has too much information. Another problematic section was the section for reporting the number of children in the household. Often, parents report the number of children eligible for the scholarship and not the total number of children. In addition, regional administrators find that parents frequently enter government assistance information in the section for what program their child is enrolled.

#### **Application Potential Malfeasance**

Most regional administrators said they have not seen any malfeasance on applications. However, a few regional administrators said they would not necessarily know how to spot it and would like some training on this.

#### **Forecasting award amounts**

Regional administrators are all struggling to balance funds without leaving any unspent or overcommitted. Forecasting award amounts is a major challenge for them. They often encumber the full scholarship amount for each child when the award is made; however, sometimes families do not need the full amount. The MDE has given the regions the option of holding scholarships at lower amounts. But doing this can present a degree of risk to the regional administrator. Regional administrators indicated frustration that money is tied up when they could be reaching more children with those funds. However, they also indicated concern about the risk of underfunding scholarships.

## **Communication**

### **Notification of award**

Regional administrators generally notify families that they will receive a scholarship through a letter. They also send a letter to the provider if the family has identified one. The letter the families receive includes information about Parent Aware and how to find a provider if they do not have one.

### **Providers**

Regional administrators generally reported they have good communication with providers and find their main role with providers is to answer questions. One regional administrator has developed a welcome packet with scholarship information for new providers.

### **Parents**

Regional administrators have varying degrees of contact with families. Some regional administrators predominately communicate with providers while some have more contact with families. Those regional administrators who communicate with families find one of the biggest issues they encounter is keeping family contact information up-to-date because these families are likely to move frequently.

Most regional administrators expressed concern about parents who are not well educated about the program. Regional administrators reported that many families are getting all their information about the scholarships from providers who may not fully understand the program themselves. Several regional administrators have discovered that some families do not know they can take the Pathway I scholarships with them if they change providers. One regional administrator said she would like the families in her region to be required to contact her for the application so she can educate them, rather than relying on the providers.

### **Providers adhering to approved uses**

Regional administrators reported that providers are funding approved uses with the scholarships. They also reported they receive many Pathway II questions from providers on approved uses, and answer many questions for providers with Pathway II scholarships. Many regional administrators said providers and administrators should be better educated about how to use Pathway II funds.

## **Invoicing**

### **Frequency of billing**

Most regional administrators invoice monthly; however, several offer other options in addition to monthly. Two regional administrators allow providers to propose what works best for them. One regional administrator invoices school districts and Head Start quarterly. One regional administrator invoices family childcare providers weekly because she finds they will not participate unless they are paid weekly.

### **Providers' level of understanding of the invoicing process**

Regional administrators generally reported that after an initial learning curve, providers understand the invoicing process. Some regional administrators have created written guides. One regional administrator has held workshops and travelled to providers' facilities to conduct orientations on the program.

### **Timely payments**

All regional administrators reported that they are able to make timely payment to providers.

### **Potential Malfeasance**

Regional administrators were asked if they have encountered malfeasance in any claims. Most regional administrators commented they commonly find that providers make mistakes on claims, but only three said they have encountered potential malfeasance. These regional administrators all worked with the MDE to resolve the potential issues.

### **Follow-up on required forms**

#### **Developmental screening**

Providers are required to submit documentation to the regional administrators to verify that each child has had a developmental screening within 90 days of receiving the scholarship award. Regional administrators have various tracking systems, but reported several issues that make collecting this information challenging. A few regional administrators reported that some school districts simply do not have the capacity to meet the 90-day requirement. Many school districts contract this out, which has made it more challenging in some cases for regional administrators to know the status of the screenings due to layers of communication. Sometimes, public health departments may be involved. Some districts only test twice per year, so they may not meet the 90-day deadline because of timing. In addition, there is no consequence for not providing the information. Regional administrators generally reported that there is not a well-defined process for receiving developmental screening documentation.

#### **Participation agreement**

Providers must sign a participation agreement outlining their responsibilities related to the scholarship, which regional administrators track in a database. Most regional administrators indicated they withhold payments until this form is completed and received.

#### **Adequacy of eight percent administration fee**

About half of the regional administrators reported that the eight percent fee did not cover the cost of administering the program. One regional administrator indicated the reporting was onerous. Several regional administrators said they were managing with the eight percent fee now, but as the program grows, it will become harder. For comparison, the eight percent administration fee is consistent with the DHS' Child Care Aware funds.

### **Improvements**

When asked to provide suggestions on improving the program, regional administrators offered the following suggestions:

#### **1. Improve communication from the MDE**

##### *a) Consolidate communication*

Most regional administrators noted the MDE communicates often and thoroughly with them. However, they would like the MDE to consolidate their communication. Some regional administrators suggested a listserv or portal for communication and storing documents so they can be searched.

***b) Implementation manual***

Many regional administrators also indicated they would like the MDE to update the implementation manual so it is more detailed and conclusive. Regional administrators also said the decision log used in the past was very helpful and they would like it to be reestablished.

***c) Improve response time***

Regional administrators are sensitive to the fact that MDE staff are working hard to respond to situations and answer questions in a comprehensive manner as they arise. They also realize the program is new and requires thoughtfully working through questions to be consistent and have the appropriate impact on policy. However, most indicated, when at all possible, that they need faster responses from the MDE.

**2. Implement a uniform database**

All regional administrators expressed some level of frustration over the lack of a standardized way to track scholarship data. Some regional administrators have developed their own systems. Many regional administrators have purchased a database developed by ThinkSmall. But they reported they need something more comprehensive that can track financial and demographic data and simplify the reporting.

The MDE developed a new database for scholarship administration, the Early Learning Scholarship Administration System (ELSA). This database was made available to scholarship administrators in January 2015. The database addresses many concerns voiced by regional administrators in this evaluation. The MDE has incorporated training and included many features in ELSA that ease reporting. In addition, the MDE hired an ELSA project manager in December 2014 who is responsible for coordinating user experience with the development of software timelines, protocol, and capabilities.

**3. Provide more clarity about the regional administrators' role with Pathway II**

Regional administrators generally expressed frustration over administering Pathway II scholarships. They have found school districts in general do not understand Pathway II and have far more questions (and more involved questions) than they anticipated. The MDE's instruction to regional administrators has been to send all Pathway II questions to the MDE. However, Pathway II administration takes much more time than regional administrators expected. They find the school districts see the regional administrators, not the MDE, as the main information source for Pathway II. Therefore, regional administrators have received most of the calls with Pathway II questions. Because they interact with some Pathway II providers, many regional administrators expressed a need to be better informed about Pathway II.

To address some of this frustration, changes to the administration of Pathway II scholarships have been made. Beginning in July 2016, school districts and Head Start will be invoiced and paid by the MDE for Pathway II scholarships. Regional administrators will continue to reimburse Pathway II scholarships for childcare center providers.

**4. Provide more training for regional administrators**

Regional administrators indicated wanting more training on how to verify income and identify malfeasance on applications and provider claims.

## Providers' Experience

The MDE provided MAD with contact information for all providers in the state serving scholarship children. The online provider survey link was emailed to all these providers (475). The MDE was unable to locate accurate email addresses for 19 providers; therefore, 456 providers received the survey. Of these providers, 51 percent (233) responded. Surveys were emailed out in early February 2015. The initial email was followed up by two reminder emails. The survey closed in late February. (See Appendix B for a list of the survey questions.)

### Provider Survey Highlights

- Respondents to the online provider survey reported families most commonly learn about the scholarships through their providers.
- They generally found the scholarship materials are easy for families to access; however, providers in the Metro area were less likely to report this.
- Most respondents said families are able to complete the scholarship application on their own. Metro area providers were less likely than Greater Minnesota providers to report their families did not need assistance.
- Respondents indicated they refer few families to the regional administrator for assistance.
- Respondents generally reported they have a good relationship with and adequate communication from their regional administrator. They reported they receive timely and accurate technical assistance. They also reported they understand the invoicing process.
- In terms of Pathway II communication, respondents reported they contact their regional administrator before the MDE with Pathway II questions.
- Nearly all Pathway II respondents indicated scholarship funds help them provide extended or improved services to children.
- Over one-third of Pathway II respondents said they use 75 percent or more of their scholarship funds on expansion, and one-third said they use 75 percent or more of their scholarship funds on enhancement.
- About one-third of respondents (34%) said all or most of their scholarship children would not be able to attend their program without the scholarship.

*The following provides detailed information supporting the highlights above.*

### Analysis of Survey Respondents' versus Recipients' Attributes

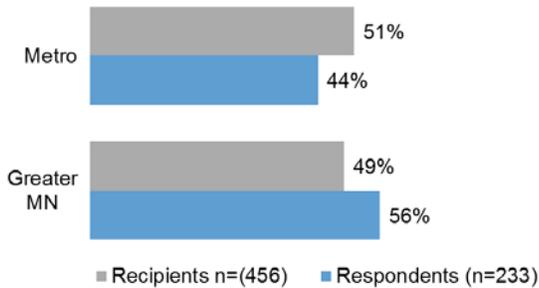
The following describes certain attributes of the providers who responded to the online survey compared to those of all the providers who received the survey (the respondents and the non-respondents together). The information illustrates how representative the respondents are of the entire population of scholarship providers and where there may be differences. Because the survey was distributed to the entire population of scholarship providers and not a random sample, the results describe the population but are not statistically generalizable to the entire scholarship provider population.

### Region

In general, the proportions of respondents in each region were similar to the proportions of providers who received the survey. However, the survey results somewhat underrepresent the Metro area

providers. The Metro area had the largest variation with 51 percent of the survey recipients but 44 percent of the respondents. The rest of the regions were within three percentage points of those receiving the survey compared to those responding. Overall, 44 percent of the respondents were in the Metro Region and 56 percent were in Greater Minnesota.

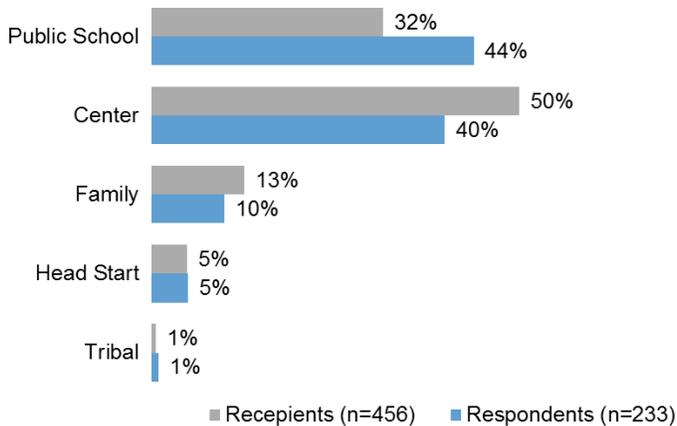
**Chart 8: Respondents versus Recipients by Region**



**Program Type**

The survey results over represent public school providers and under-represent childcare center and family providers. Forty-four percent of the respondents were public school providers compared to 32 percent of the recipients. Half of the recipients were childcare center providers but 40 percent of the respondents were this type. The proportion of Head Start recipients and respondents was the same (5%), as was the proportion of Tribal providers (1%).

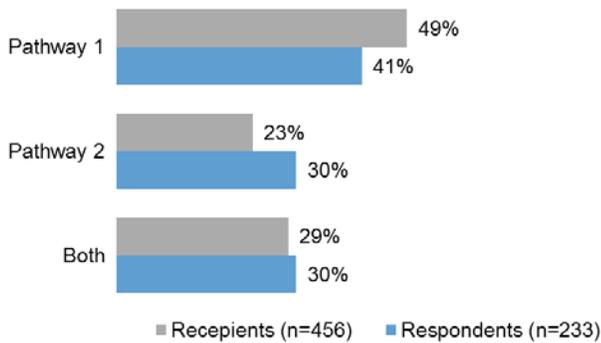
**Chart 9: Respondent versus Recipient by Program Type**



**Pathway**

The survey results slightly under-represent Pathway I providers and over-represent Pathway II providers. Forty-one percent of the respondents were Pathway I providers compared to 49 percent of the survey recipients. Thirty percent of respondents were Pathway II providers compared to 23 percent of the survey recipients. The percent of providers with both Pathway I and II children was nearly the same for respondent and recipients.

**Chart 10: Respondent versus Recipient by Pathway Type**



**Summary of Respondent versus Recipient Attributes**

In general, the attributes described above do not have large variances between respondents and recipients. However, the differences are important to consider in the context of the survey results. Therefore, the survey data for providers somewhat over-represents Greater Minnesota, public school providers, and Pathway II providers, and under-represents Metro providers, Pathway I providers, and childcare center and family providers.

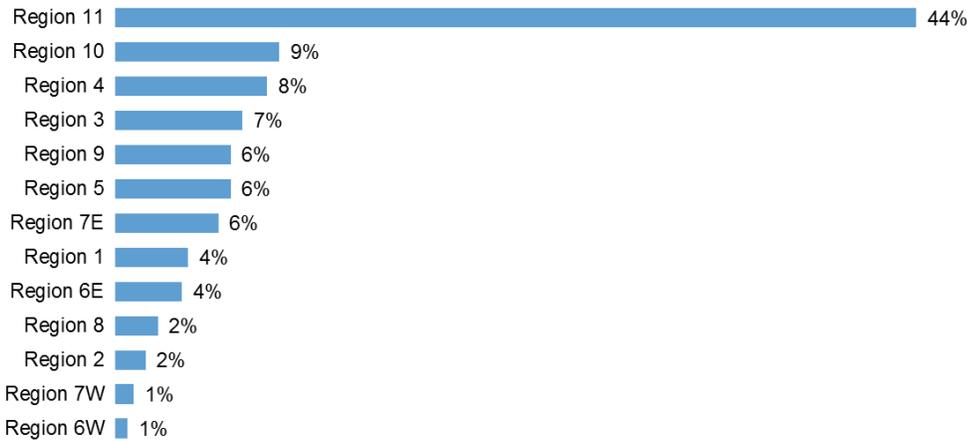
**Results of the Provider Survey**

**Region**

As discussed above, 44 percent of the respondents were Metro area providers. The chart below details the distribution of respondents across all the regions.

**Chart 11: Respondents by Region**

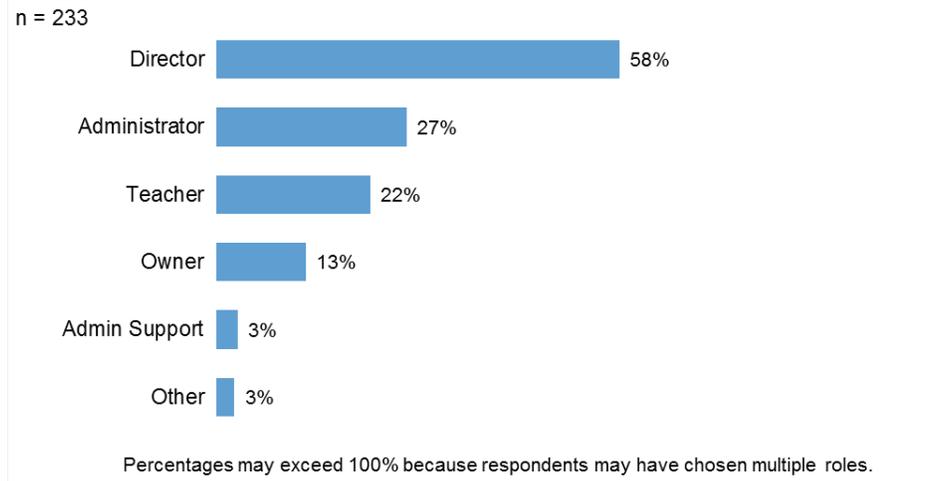
n=233



## Respondent Role

Survey respondents were most often directors of the facilities (58%).

**Chart 12: Role of Respondent**



## Number of Sites and Number of scholarship Children

Respondents represented many different types and sizes of childcare programs. Of the Pathway I respondents, the majority (76%) has only one site and, of these, the majority (77%) has fewer than ten scholarship children. Of the Pathway II respondents, the majority (69%) has only one site and, of these, the majority (61%) has fewer than ten scholarship children.

## Parent Aware Rating

An overwhelming majority (91%) of respondents indicated they had a four-star Parent Aware rating. Most respondents (81%) were Parent Aware-rated before participating in the scholarships. Fifteen percent said they pursued a Parent Aware rating in order to participate in the scholarship program. Most respondents (79%) indicated they were aware that on July 1, 2016 only programs with active three- or four-star ratings would be eligible to receive scholarship.

## Application Process

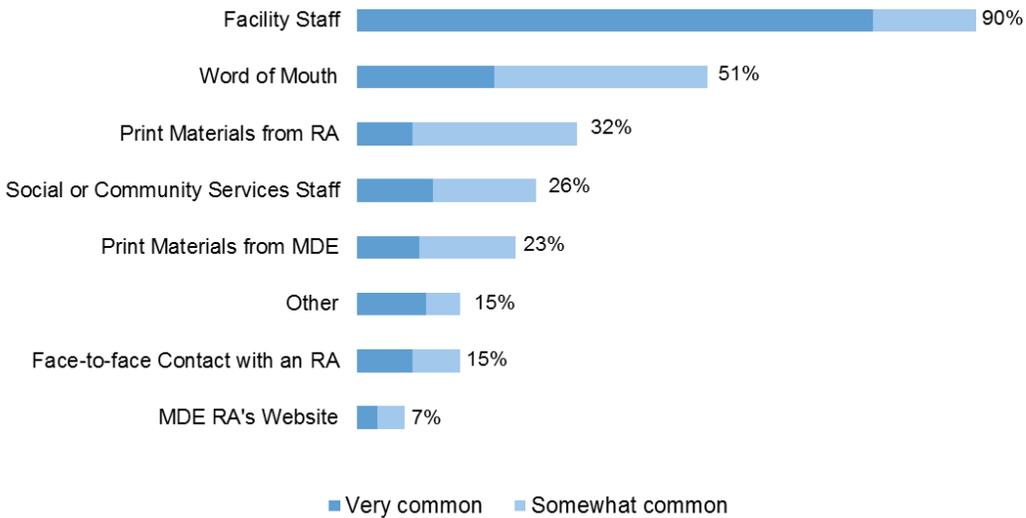
Providers were asked several questions about families' experiences accessing the scholarship program. The survey included questions about how families learn of the scholarships, how easy the scholarship materials are to access, how much assistance families generally need completing the scholarship application, and how often they are referred to a regional administrator.

## *Awareness of the scholarships*

From the providers' perspectives, most families learn about both Pathway I and Pathway II scholarships through their providers.

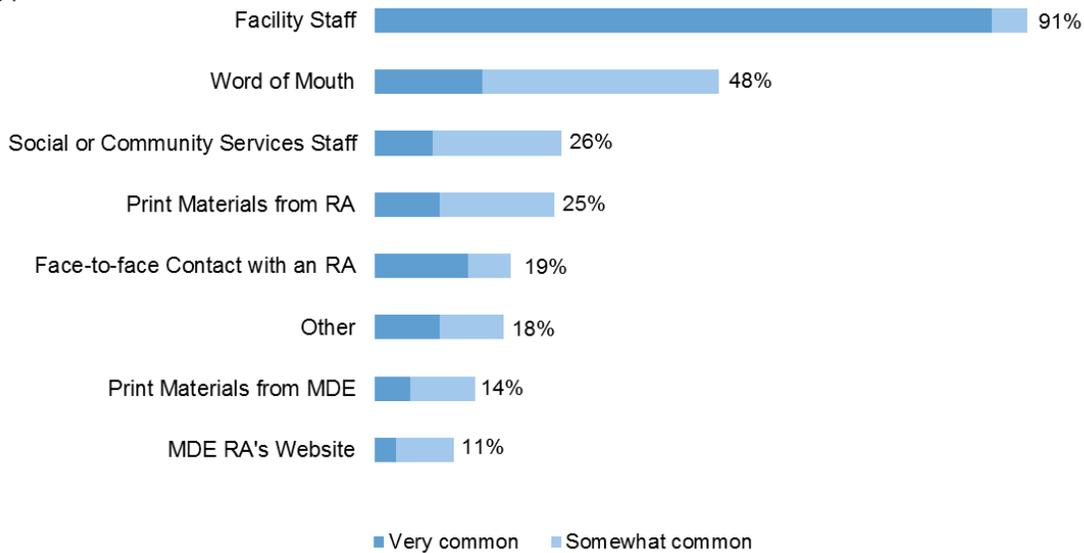
**Chart 13: How Pathway I Families Learn about the Scholarships**

n=164



**Chart 14: How Pathway II Families Learn about the Scholarships**

n=134



***Ease of accessing materials***

Respondents were asked to rate their perception of the ease of accessing scholarship materials<sup>4</sup>. Most respondents (62%) agreed the scholarship program and materials were easy for families and providers

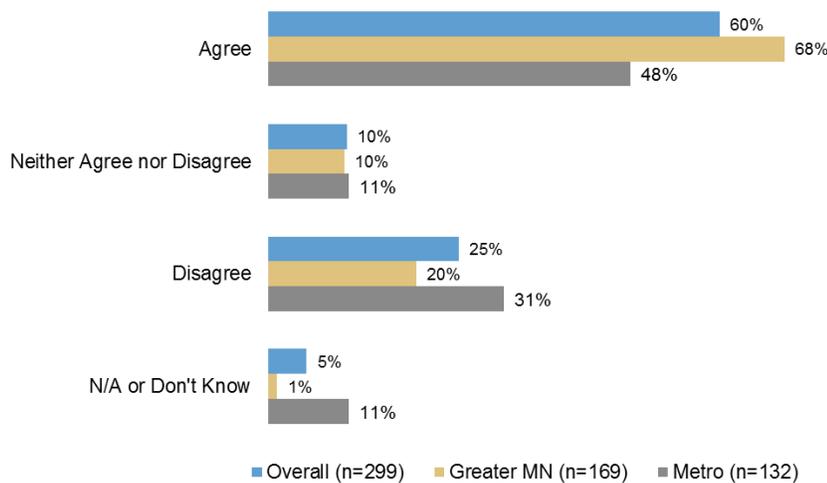
<sup>4</sup> Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with several statements. All agreement-rating scales on the provider survey were comprised of the following choices: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, I Don't Know, Not Applicable.

to access. Eighteen percent were neutral and 15 percent disagreed. There was little variation by Pathway type. The one difference by geography to note is the high percentage of Pathway II Metro area providers who indicated they disagree (33% of these providers) compared to Pathway II Greater Minnesota providers who disagree (7%).

***Ease of completing the scholarship application***

Overall, most respondents (60%) agreed families were able to complete the scholarship application on their own; however, one-quarter (25%) disagreed. A larger proportion of Pathway II (30%) versus Pathway I (21%) respondents disagreed. By geography, respondents from Greater Minnesota were more likely to agree than Metro respondents (68% versus 48%, respectively).

**Chart 15: Families Are Able to Complete the Scholarship Application on Their Own<sup>5</sup>**

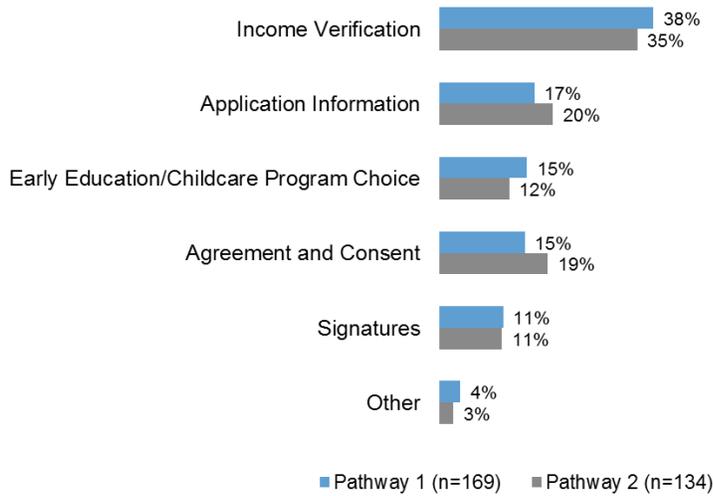


Respondents were asked to report the percentage of families at their facility who needed help with the scholarship application. Pathway II providers were more likely than Pathway I providers to indicate their families needed help with the scholarship application. Only nine percent of Pathway II providers versus 22 percent of Pathway I providers said none of their families need help. Of the Pathway I providers, 30 percent said more than half of their families need assistance, and for Pathway II providers, the proportion was 55 percent. There was little difference by geography.

Respondents from both Pathways most frequently identified the income verification section of the application as the section families most often need help completing.

<sup>5</sup> Many of the questions on the provider survey asked those who participate in both Pathways to answer the questions twice: once for their experience with Pathway I and once for Pathway II. Therefore, many charts in this section include the number of *responses* to questions rather than the number of *respondents*, which double counts respondents who serve both Pathway I and Pathway II children. In these cases, the “overall” total numbers are more than the total number of respondents to the survey (233).

**Chart 16: Section of the Application with which Families Needed Help**



***Percentage of assistance referred to regional administrator***

Of the respondents who indicated their families need assistance with the scholarship application, respondents said a small percentage of families were referred to the regional administrator for assistance. About one-third of respondents said they refer between 1 to 25 percent of families, and approximately 40 percent reported sending no families to the regional administrator for assistance.

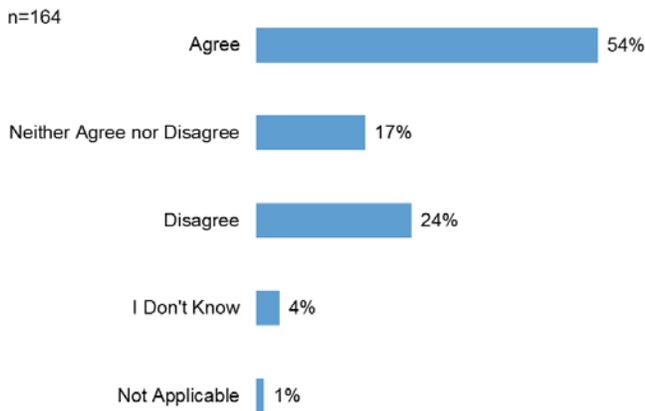
***Percentage of families already attending program***

Slightly fewer than half of the respondents said 75 to 100 percent of their scholarship families were already attending their facility when they applied. One-quarter of respondents reported only around 25 percent or less of their scholarship families were attending their program when they applied.

***Percentage of eligible families receiving scholarship***

Pathway I providers were asked if they agreed that eligible families received scholarship funds when they applied for them. Slightly over half (54%) agreed and almost one-quarter (24%) disagreed. Providers in the Metro area were twice as likely to disagree compared to those in Greater Minnesota (36% versus 15%, respectively).

**Chart 17: Eligible Families Receive Scholarship When They Apply**



***Ability to determine Pathway type***

Respondents who have both Pathway I and Pathway II scholarship children (n=69) were asked if they agreed that they had the ability to determine which Pathway type is most appropriate for each family. The majority agreed (70%), 12 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 12 percent disagreed.

**Providers' Experience with Regional Administrators**

***Relationship with regional administrator***

The majority (77%) of respondents agreed they have a good relationship with their regional administrator. Only six respondents indicated they did not have a good relationship with their regional administrator. Fourteen percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and six percent said they did not know. There was little variation by geography or Pathway type.

***Communication from regional administrator***

The majority (70%) of respondents indicated they have adequate communication from their regional administrator about the scholarship program. Sixteen percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and five percent said they did not know. Only seven percent indicated their regional administrator does not communicate well with them. There was little variation by geography or Pathway type.

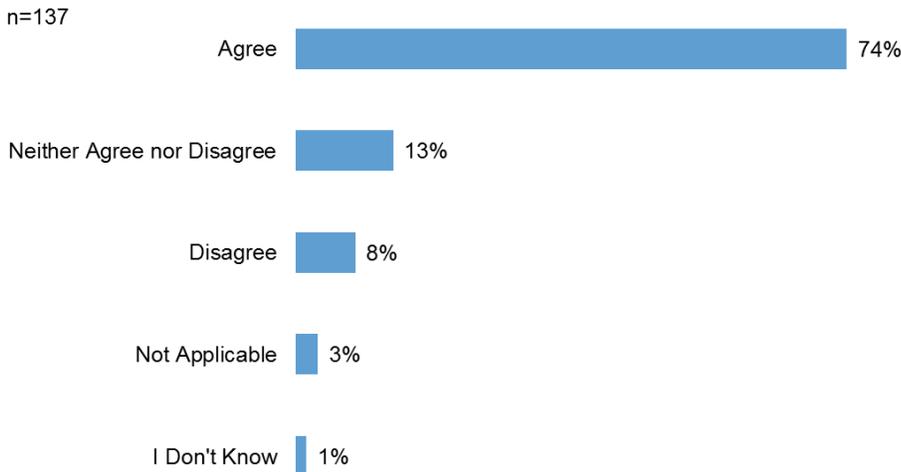
***Technical assistance received***

Most respondents agreed they receive timely (77%) and accurate (79%) technical assistance in a professional manner from their regional administrator. Only five percent disagreed with each statement and about 10 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. There was little variation by geography or Pathway type.

***Timely confirmation of Pathway II applicant eligibility***

Most of the Pathway II providers (74%) indicated they receive timely confirmation from their regional administrators on applicant eligibility.

**Chart 18: Regional Administrators are Timely in their Confirmation of Pathway II Applications**



***Invoice process***

Most of the respondents (70%) agreed the invoice and payment process established by their regional administrator is clear to them. Ten percent disagreed the process was clear. Most of the respondents (76%) also agreed the payments they received from their regional administrators were timely. Only three percent disagreed. Neither geography nor Pathway had an impact on the results.

***Pathway II assistance***

Pathway II respondents were asked whom they call when they have questions or issues related to Pathway II scholarships. The majority (70%) said they call their regional administrator and 14 percent said MDE staff.

**Percentage of providers administering multiple assistance programs**

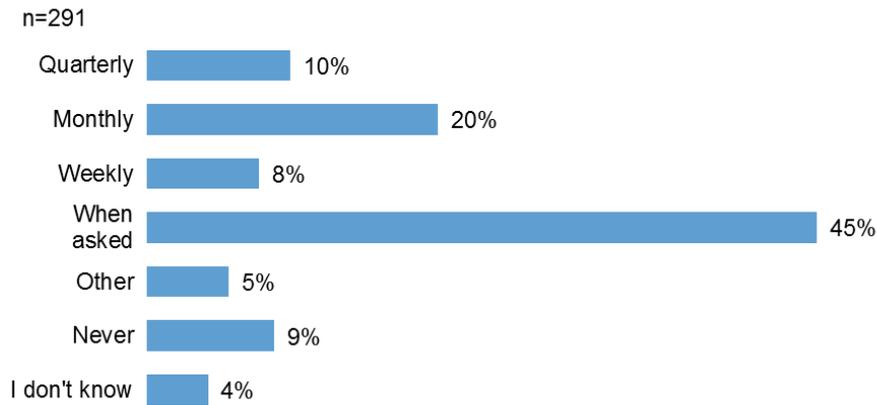
Respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of scholarship children in their program who participate in an assistance program in addition to the scholarship. The majority of respondents (55%) said less than 25 percent of their scholarship children receive other subsidies. One-quarter of respondents said more than half of their scholarship children receive another subsidy. Pathway I respondents were more likely to indicate a higher percentage of their scholarship children participated in multiple assistance programs (28% of Pathway I respondents compared to 13% of Pathway II respondents said more than half of their scholarship children received multiple subsidies.)

In terms of the ease of administering assistance programs in addition to scholarship, slightly over half of the respondents indicated the process was straightforward. Twenty percent neither agreed nor disagreed and 11 percent disagreed. Public school providers were more likely to indicate they disagreed (19%). Geography and Pathway had little impact on results.

**Providers' Communication with Parents about scholarship Fund Balance**

Slightly more than one-quarter of the providers reported they inform families of their scholarship fund balance on a regular basis. Another 45 percent said they inform parents when they ask.

**Chart 19: Frequency Provider Communicates Scholarship Fund Balance to Parents**



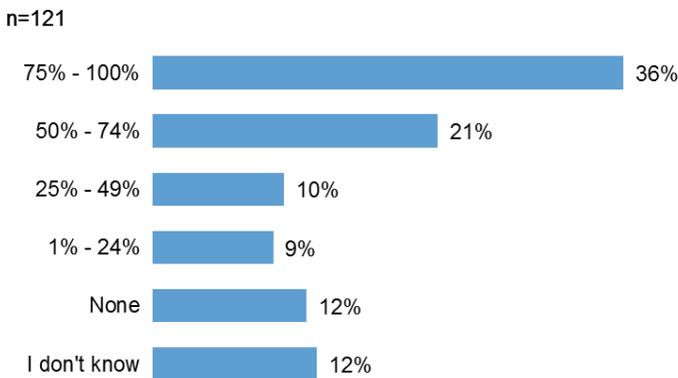
**Pathway II funding and eligible uses**

Nearly all Pathway II respondents (93%) agreed the Pathway II funds help their facilities provide expanded and/or improved service to children.

***Funding expansion versus enhancement***

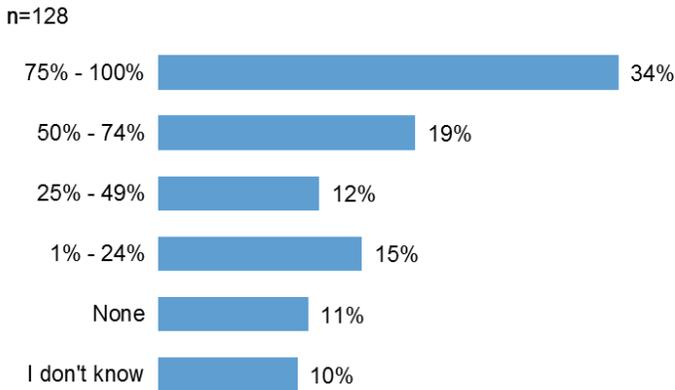
Over half of Pathway II respondents (57%) said they use 50 percent or more of scholarship funds to pay for expansion activities.

**Chart 20: Percent Funds Spent on Expansion**



Over half of Pathway II respondents (53%) also said they use 50 percent or more of scholarship funds to pay for enhancement activities.

**Chart 21: Percentage of Funds Spent on Enhancement**

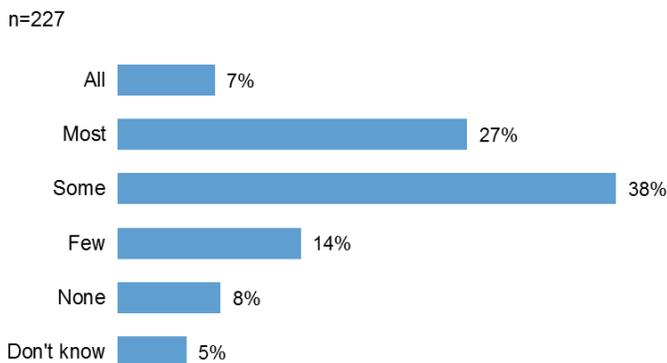


Those Pathway II respondents who indicated they use scholarship funds for enhancement (n=101) were asked which of the eligible enhancement activities they fund. The majority of respondents fund all three eligible uses:

- 77% funded comprehensive services responsive to children's needs to improve learning outcomes focused on opportunities for family engagement and parent education;
- 76% funded compensatory instructional services to accelerate literacy and language development; and
- 68% funded coordination of transition to kindergarten/early grades.

All respondents were asked how many of the children they serve would not be able to attend their facility without some form of assistance, such as a scholarship or CCAP. More than one-third said all or most of their children would not be able to do so. Less than one-quarter (22%) said few or none requires assistance. By program type, large childcare centers (48%) and public schools (40%) were the most likely to indicate all or most of their children would not be able to attend their program without some assistance.

**Chart 22: Percentage of Families Who Need the Scholarship to Attend Childcare**



### **What is working well**

All respondents were asked in an open-ended format to write about what they felt was working well with the administration of the scholarship program.

#### ***Pathway I***

One hundred and eleven respondents provided comments about the administration of Pathway I. More than half of the comments referenced good communication from and/or a good relationship with their regional administrator. About one-fifth of the comments were about the invoicing/payment process working well. A few comments highlighted the application itself and/or the application process as working well. The following are a few sample comments:

*Friendly staff to work with. A lot of hoops to jump through, but staff are willing to work with you and explain. (Metro Area Public School)*

*Payment comes in a timely manner. Vouchers are getting easier. I like receiving copies of the letters that are sent to parents, it helps me keep on top of things. (Greater Minnesota Child Care Center)*

#### ***Pathway II***

The 99 respondents who provided comments mostly focused on the helpfulness of the regional administrator, the benefit of the scholarships to families, and the ease of the application process. Respondents reported that there is good communication from regional administrators and the MDE. Respondents generally reported that the second year of the scholarship program is running better than the first one. They see improvements and are appreciative.

### **What needs improvement**

Respondents were also asked to provide written comments about what aspects of the scholarship program administration could be improved. Ninety-one respondents provided feedback on Pathway I improvement and 93 respondents provided comments on Pathway II.

#### ***Invoicing/Billing***

One-fifth of the responses focused on difficulties with invoicing and billing. Many of these comments stated that the billing cycle is inconsistent with their own financial systems, creates more paperwork for them, and increases staff time needed. Others said the start of the payment is delayed and creates a hardship on some programs that require prepayment. Most of these comments were from centers or family childcare providers.

*Our programs are pre-pay programs, so parents are expected to pay a week in advance. This scholarship payment is not in line with our policy of prepayment. (Greater Minnesota Child Care Center)*

*I get paid every week by all other families. It is a struggle for me to wait to get paid at times. (Greater Minnesota Family Child Care)*

Several responses were about not knowing the balance of funds for each child or not knowing how many scholarships are remaining. Some examples:

December 15, 2015

*There should be a monthly tally of the monies spent and the remaining balance of each scholarship and ample notice needs to be sent out to the providers before the scholarship expires. (Greater Minnesota Family Child Care)*

*I would like to be able to readily have access to how much funding a particular family has left -- was a problem last year as money ran out before the end of a year. Also, there seemed to be discrepancies between my figures (which is limited to how much I requested) and administration's. (Greater Minnesota Child care Center)*

### **Application process**

Several comments focused on issues with the application process. Some examples:

*Parents don't have the resources or means to print off the scholarship forms or mail them in, we have to always do that for them. (Greater Minnesota Child Care Center)*

*The main thing that is difficult for our population is getting the information to them and getting forms back from the families because of 2nd language barriers and homelessness. (Metro Area Public School)*

### **Clarification of requirements/processes**

Several respondents wanted more clarification about the application and payment processes as well as a better understanding of the scholarship rules. Some examples:

*Preparing the budget was and still is somewhat confusing. (Greater Minnesota Child Care Center)*

*It gets confusing knowing what exactly can be covered and differentiating between I and II. (Greater Minnesota Public School)*

### **Timing of application process**

A few respondents (all of them school districts) were frustrated about the challenges they face with budgeting and staffing due to the applications coming out in the summer. Some examples:

*I understand we have to wait until after July 1 to start enrolling families for the coming school year, but this really ties our hands. By the time we get the forms submitted in July/August, the preschool spots may be filled. This also causes a problem with programming. I can't determine how I'm going to use the Scholarship funds until I know how many students will qualify...can I hire another staff member? Can I extend the school year? Can I provide a healthy snack? These decisions can't be made until I know how many children will qualify for Scholarships. I end up making those decisions after the school year begins. I wish families could fill out enrollment forms in the spring instead of waiting until the fall. (Greater Minnesota School District)*

*It would really be nice to have the scholarship information for the following year out well before June. Registration tends to start as early as February for some districts and that is when you have more face to face contact with families and get lots of questions about scholarships for the following year. (Metro Area School District)*

## Parents'/Guardians' Experience

MAD developed a parent mailed survey with input from the MDE. The MDE provided MAD with a database of approximately 5,000 parent addresses of parents of children who received the scholarship from October 1, 2013 through February 10, 2015 and who had consented to participate in an evaluation related to the scholarship. A random sample of 1,002 parent addresses was selected. The sample was pulled by region based on the percentage of scholarship funding for each region. To increase the likelihood parents would respond to the survey, MAD asked the childcare providers of the parents in the sample to distribute a flier explaining the survey and alerting the parents that they would be receiving it in the mail.

Of the surveys mailed, 84 were sent to families whose preferred language was Spanish, Somali, or Hmong. These parents received the flier and survey materials in their preferred language. Two slightly different versions of the survey were developed, one for each Pathway, and parents were mailed the survey specific to the Pathway scholarship their child received.

The survey was mailed in late March, a reminder postcard was sent to non-responders in mid-April and the survey was sent out once again to non-responders at the end of April. The survey was open for a total of eight weeks. Common in mailed surveys, some surveys (121) were returned to MAD as undeliverable. Therefore, the total surveys mailed to accurate addresses was 881 and 234 were returned completed for a response rate of 27 percent. Of the surveys received, 18 were in Spanish, two in Hmong, and the remainder in English. (See Appendix C for a copy of the parent surveys.)

### Parents' Experience Highlights

- Three-quarters of the parents who responded to the parent survey indicated they knew their child received a scholarship. Pathway II parents were less likely than Pathway I parents to know their children received the scholarship.
- Of those who were aware their children received the scholarship, most (85%) learned about scholarship from their provider. Only 12 percent of those with a Pathway I scholarship learned about the scholarship from their regional administrator.
- Slightly over half of Pathway I respondents were aware there was a regional administrator.
- Most parents reported they completed the application on their own (69%). One-quarter received help from their provider and few from their regional administrator (5%).
- Most indicated they found the application very or somewhat easy to complete and only three percent said it was hard to complete.
- Nearly all respondents said their child attends the program they indicated on their application they wanted their children to attend.
- Pathway I parents reported that they were able to find an eligible provider fairly quickly: 30 percent said they already attended their current provider's program when they applied for scholarship, half said it took them less than a month to find an eligible provider, and only five percent indicated they needed more than two months to find a provider.
- Parents are generally unaware of the balance of their scholarship funds. About one-third of respondents said they never got information on the balance and one-quarter said they got a balance only when they asked. Pathway I respondents were more likely than Pathway II respondents to report that they got information on the balance of funds.

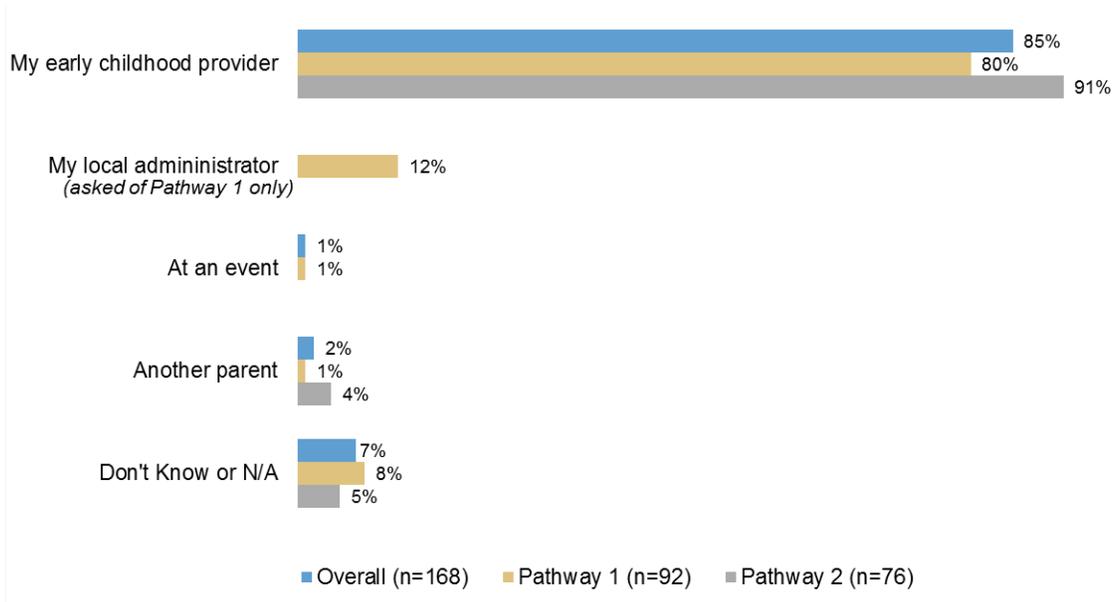
The following provides detailed information supporting the highlights above.

### Awareness of Scholarship and Regional Administrator

The first question the survey asked parents was if they knew their children received a scholarship. The majority (73%) of parents indicated they were aware their children received the scholarship. However, 27 percent were not aware they were receiving the scholarship. Pathway I recipients were more likely than Pathway II recipients to be aware their children received a scholarship (89% versus 60%, respectively). The following analysis includes only those respondents who indicated they knew their child received the scholarship because the questions related directly to their experience of applying for scholarship.

Of those who knew their children were receiving a scholarship, most learned about scholarship from their early childhood provider (85%). That percentage was higher for Pathway II respondents (91%) compared to Pathway I respondents (80%). Respondents were least likely to learn about scholarship from an event or another parent. Twelve percent of Pathway I respondents indicated they learned about scholarship from their local administrator (Pathway II respondents were not given this option on their survey because it was not relevant to them due to the fact that they would have applied through their provider).

**Chart 23: How Parents Learned of the Scholarship**

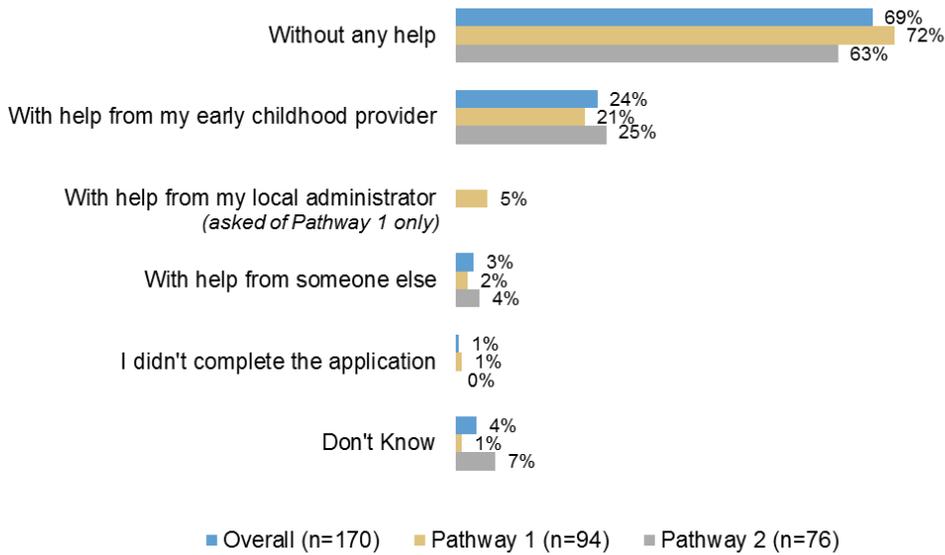


Slightly over half (54%) of Pathway I respondents indicated they knew there was a local administrator who could help them with scholarship processes and questions (e.g., completing an application or choosing an early childhood provider). This question was not asked of Pathway II respondents.

### Experience with the Scholarship Application Process

Most parents (69%) said they completed the application without any help. Some (24%) received help from their early childhood provider. Very few respondents indicated they got help from their regional administrator.

**Chart 24: How Parents Completed the Scholarship Application**



**Ease of Completing the Scholarship Application**

Overall, most of the respondents indicated the application was “very easy” or “somewhat easy” to complete (81%) and only three percent said it was “somewhat hard” (none said it was “very hard”). Thirteen percent reported it was neither easy nor hard. Respondents from both Pathways reported similar ratings.

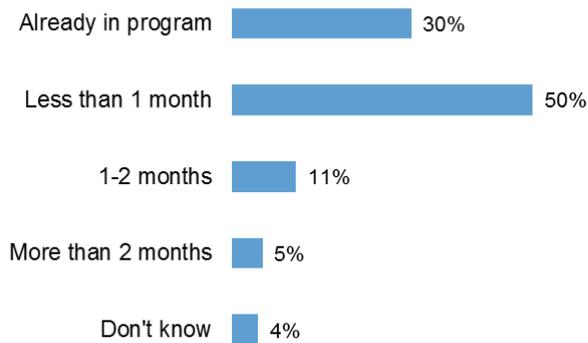
**Choice of Provider**

Respondents were asked if their child attends the program they wanted when they applied for scholarship. Overall, 95 percent said that at the time they completed the survey their child was attending the program they wanted when they applied for the scholarship. There was little variation by Pathway type.

Pathway I respondents were asked how long it took them to find an eligible provider. Thirty percent reported they were already attending an eligible program when they applied and 50 percent said it took them less than one month to find an eligible program. Only five percent said it took them more

Chart 25: Time to Find an Eligible Program

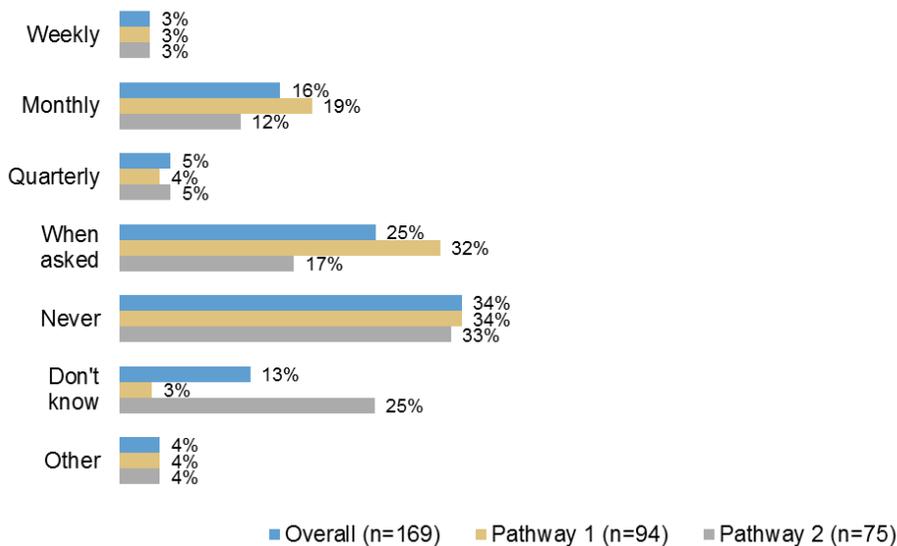
n=94



**Provider Communication on Scholarship Balance**

Overall, respondents reported not receiving regular or any updates on the balance of their scholarship funds. About one-third of the respondents reported they never get an update and one-quarter (26%) of respondents reported they get updates only when they ask. Pathway II respondents were much more likely than Pathway I respondents to report they do not know if they get updates (25% versus 3%, respectively).

Chart 26: Frequency of Provider Updates on Scholarship Balance

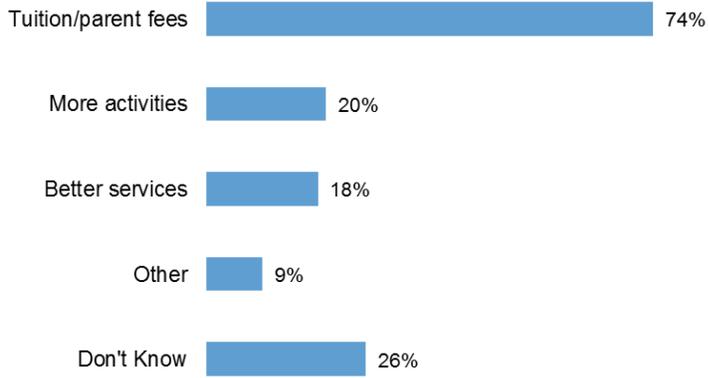


### Expenses Funded by Scholarship

Pathway II parents were asked what expenses they think their scholarships fund. Most parents (74%) said tuition/parent fees. One-quarter (26%) said they did not know.

**Chart 27: Parents Think their Scholarship Pays for...**

n=76



Total sums to over 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.

## Stakeholders' Experience

In the fall of 2014, MAD conducted thirteen one-on-one and small group interviews with 27 stakeholders selected by the MDE. Interviews were in person or by phone and lasted from one to two hours each. (See appendix D for interview questions.)

Types of providers interviewed included:

- Minneapolis Public Schools
- St. Paul Public Schools
- New Horizons Academy
- KinderCare Learning Centers
- Minnesota Head Start Association
- YWCA of Minneapolis Early Childhood Education
- Independent childcare providers in Greater Minnesota

Other organizations interviewed included:

- Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE)
- Minnesota Community Education Association (MCEA)
- Minnesota Initiative Foundations
- Child Care Aware
- Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

### Stakeholder Interviews Highlights

Stakeholders indicated:

- They have positive relationships with regional administrators. Communication was frequent and accurate. They reported regional administrators are helpful and responsive.
- Families most often learn about scholarships through their providers.
- Parents need assistance completing the application and they get this from providers and regional administrators. The income eligibility section is the most problematic.
- Payments are timely.
- They would like more detail on the billing statement so providers can track funds by child.
- Scholarship materials from the MDE come too late to be useful to them. The timing also creates staffing problems and communication issues with parents.
- The challenge of forecasting the needs of a family is a balancing act for regional administrators.
- Due to data practice standards, the Parent Aware database does not track which providers have scholarship children so there is no way to specifically reach out to scholarship providers in addition to the general notice they receive to ensure they understand how their rating status impacts their scholarship eligibility.

*The following provides detailed information supporting the highlights above.*

### What's working well

When asked what is working well with the scholarships, most provider interviewees cited their relationship with their regional administrator. Many said they appreciate their regional administrator's

responsiveness and communication. Some said great partnerships and collaboration are a positive result of the scholarship program. Interviewees also discussed the huge impact of the scholarships for families. They reported parents are very appreciative and are able to choose higher quality childcare than without a scholarship. They also stressed that the scholarships have helped stabilize attendance at their facilities.

Non-provider interviewees had many positive comments about the scholarships. One interviewee highlighted the extent that the scholarships have helped smaller districts serve more families. Another commented on the importance of choice (center versus school district) for families, especially in small towns where there may not be any childcare providers. Interviewees generally reported that regional administrators are doing a good job with the resources they have. One interviewee commented that most issues with the program are related to it being a new program.

### **How do families generally learn about the Early Learning Scholarship?**

The overwhelming consensus from providers is that families predominately learn about the scholarships from provider staff. According to interviewees, few families come to providers with a scholarship already in hand. Provider staff are educating parents about the scholarships and often helping them with the application process. Some interviewees talked about wanting to do more education with families about the scholarships, but holding off because supply is currently not meeting demand. Some providers also discussed their process of looking holistically with the family at their options and helping them piece together funding for childcare and make a plan.

### **Outreach issues**

Some interviewees said it is not possible for regional administrators to interact with families because they are generally too far away. Regional administrators are effective, but they do not have enough resources to conduct outreach in large geographic areas. There is a need to identify additional sources to assist with outreach and interact with these parents in their communities. Several interviewees said there should be an interagency approach utilizing other systems, such as social services and public health. Providers are often conducting the outreach, but they do not always have a good understanding of scholarship.

### **Application Process**

#### ***Assistance needed by parents***

Most interviewees indicated families often need some amount of assistance completing the application, which they mainly get from provider staff or regional administrators. Several interviewees said language is the largest barrier to completing the applications. One interviewee indicated nearly 100 percent of the English Language Learner families require help with the application. In addition, several interviewees reported the new application, although an improvement, is still visually and contextually challenging and too long.

Interviewees' experiences with families completing the application varied depending on the type of provider. Larger childcare providers reported families did not necessarily need assistance with the application but often want someone to look it over and make sure it is completed correctly. Some

providers said they generally complete the application with families and use it as a family engagement tool.

The overall length and complexity of the language on the application is difficult for non-native English speakers. One interviewee reported some parents have not printed or spelled their child's name before. Some interviewees said some providers complete applications for families and highlight sections they need to finish. The income verification section in particular is hard for many families to understand.

### *Issues with timing*

One main complaint about the application process was the timing of when the application materials are made available. Interviewees reported that the materials come out too late, creating staffing problems as well as communication issues with families. In addition, schools plan in the spring for the following year, but cannot plan accurately because they do not know how many scholarships will be available.

Related to timing, one school district indicated a large barrier in getting parents to complete the application is a lack of personal contact because most of the children take the bus to school. One school district reported they need the application forms in the spring when parents come into their offices to enroll for the fall because this may be the only time they see the parents. In contrast to the school districts, the large childcare providers generally see parents twice a day.

When an application is completed and signed but staff find errors, they have 30 days to fix the errors. This 30-day deadline can be challenging for school districts to meet with a transient population and when staff has limited face-to-face contact with parents. The school districts in particular suggested that if the applications came out in the spring, the process would allow them more time to connect with parents and resolve issues.

### *Problematic sections of the application*

When asked what specifically about the application was difficult, many said the income eligibility section was where most families need assistance. Many families also struggle with how to complete the ethnicity section. Other issues included knowing how to complete the application for a parent living with extended family or when there are siblings in the household over 18 years old.

One interviewee provided the following detailed feedback for improving the invoice form format:

- Reformat the claim form with page breaks to make it more readable;
- Add a column for an end date when dis-enrolling; and
- Reformat to make the form less confusing when there is one program with multiple sites.

### *Scholarship qualification streamlined*

Many interviewees reported that the scholarship application is redundant when families have already been approved for other assistance programs. For example, most scholarship families have also applied for Free and Reduced Priced Lunch, and some interviewees suggested that the scholarship application for these families be tied to their qualification for the FRPL program. One interviewee asked whether the application process could somehow be tied to other assistance programs that also have the same income requirements. They suggested this may be a way to reduce the redundancy for families and for

staff in these situations where families have already been approved for other assistance programs with similar income requirements.

### **Interaction with Regional Administrators**

Interviewees were very positive about their experience with their regional administrator. They reported communication is productive and collaborative. Providers indicated their regional administrators are generally helpful and prompt. One provider said they are “confident what their regional administrator says is accurate and they are willing to explain things.” Another said their regional administrator is “very open and helpful.”

### **Invoice Process**

#### *Timeliness of Payment*

All interviewees indicated they are paid on time.

#### *Timing of payments*

The main issue that arose around invoicing was about timing. Interviewees explained family providers in particular need payments more than once per month and cannot handle slow cash flow as easily as centers. They also indicated school districts are challenged because their current system does not report expenses per child, and the scholarships are unlike most other funding school districts receive.

#### *More details on billing statements*

A major challenge nearly all interviewees raised was the need for more detailed remittance sheets. They want a breakdown by child for the payments so they know the balance of scholarship funds for each child. They reported often spending hours trying to balance the payment they receive for each child. Also, some interviewees with both Pathway I and Pathway II scholarships said it is hard to track Pathway I versus Pathway II billing when the checks combine payments for both Pathway types.

Interviewees provided the following suggestions for improving the invoice process:

- Get all regional administrators on the same billing cycle to eliminate confusion for those providers who work in multiple regions.
- Conduct billing online.
- Eliminate redundancies in completing the invoice forms from month to month. For many providers, the same information is repeated each month, but the invoice has to be re-completed each month.
- Allow providers to submit invoices on a schedule other than monthly. Some providers said monthly invoicing is hard for them to align with their internal finances and the billing system of the counties. Regional administrators vary in the flexibility of their billing cycles.
- Develop a consistent system to handle the situation when counties change their co-pay rates. Since counties commonly change the amount they will cover, providers regularly must go back to the regional administrators and reconcile payments.
- Refine the invoice process and document it in one place.

### *Planning/Budgeting Issues*

Several planning and budgeting issues were raised. One interviewee described the difficulty of holding spaces for families wanting to attend their program during the scholarship application process. That

process generally takes about two weeks and during that time, the provider, although not required to do so by the MDE, often holds a spot for the family while their scholarship application is in process. During this time, revenue for this spot is not generated but they still have the same expenses. Another issue was the challenge of not being able to plan for when Pathway I families change providers. Also creating challenges for providers, especially school districts, is the timing of when they learn the amount of Pathway II scholarships they will receive for the coming year. Schools do their budgeting in the spring and have to do it without knowing how many Pathway II scholarships they will receive.

### **Combining the scholarships with other assistance programs**

Some interviewees reported that working with the CCAP and the scholarships was complicated and time consuming. One small childcare provider explained that it takes the local CCAP staff a long time to process paperwork, causing the invoices to be delayed and making it hard to determine when to charge. In comparison, a larger provider said they have systems in place so they are able to keep families up to date.

### **Parent Aware**

#### *Scholarships as an incentive to obtain a rating*

In general, interviewees were positive about the Parent Aware rating system and reported scholarships have been an incentive for providers to obtain a rating. However, some said the incentive has been minimal. One interviewee commented that most providers only want the one-star rating because they get some financial benefit but do not have the stringent requirements and costs required to maintain a four-star rating. Another interviewee reported parents do not care about the rating and providers are obtaining ratings in order to access more funds, not to attract more families. Many said the two-year cycle for being re-rated is too short. Several interviewees indicated family childcare providers are not applying for the rating because it is one more thing to track and they often do not have openings anyway.

#### *Parent Aware renewal issues*

Due to data privacy standards, Parent Aware renewal data does not include information on which providers have scholarship children. This was a major concern among staff at the DHS in terms of how it affects their ability to specifically reach out to scholarship providers with expiring ratings. The concern is that some scholarship providers may not understand their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve. If a provider with scholarship children loses their Parent Aware rating, the family must find another provider. There are two databases: one maintained by the DHS that tracks the Parent Aware facilities, and the other maintained by the MDE that tracks the scholarship children. The DHS has a system in place for alerting all Parent Aware providers well in advance as their rating nears expiration. However, due to data privacy standards, the Parent Aware database does not track which providers have scholarship children, so there is no way to specifically reach out to scholarship providers in addition to the general notice they receive.

#### *Issue of rating provider partnerships*

Most interviewees had comments about how programs working with partners are rated. The scholarships cannot be split between multiple programs. Stakeholders indicated there is still confusion about how to handle a situation where a childcare program is in partnership with a Head Start or a

school program. They are not always clear which entity should be rated, although the MDE has communicated guidelines on how to handle these situations in the latest version of the regional administrator manual. This is often an issue in Greater Minnesota, where many communities have worked to align the few programs they have. They wondered if ratings would need to be at the classroom level rather than the facility level.

***Parent Aware rating requirements***

One provider in Greater Minnesota discussed their ability to maintain their Parent Aware rating, given staffing challenges. They indicated that in Greater Minnesota it is frequently a challenge to find qualified teachers, which affects a provider's ability to continue their Parent Aware rating. They highlighted that scholarships have drastically increased the number of low-income children they serve, but keeping scholarship children depends on their ability to maintain their Parent Aware rating.

**Child Care Aware**

Child Care Aware indicated they feel somewhat disconnected and unclear about the scholarships. They would like to see the relationship between Parent Aware and the scholarships strengthened, possibly by having Parent Aware coaches regularly attend the regional administrator meetings and having regional administrators attend the Child Care Aware district planning meetings.

**Lack of waitlists in some areas**

When asked why some areas of the state do not have a waitlist for the scholarships, interviewees most often described the lack of providers in more remote areas. Many children in Greater Minnesota live significant distances from eligible providers.

**Administrative issue**

Some interviewees explained that some Pathway I providers are overwhelmed when managing multiple programs. The scholarships create much paperwork so those providers that need it the most may not be participating. One interviewee said scholarships are not creating additional but replacement funds. The benefit to the providers is they are consistently paid when working with the scholarships.

## Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

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The scholarship program is still a relatively new program. The value of evaluating the program at this point is to provide timely formative feedback to the MDE so components that are working well can be reinforced and supported and those that need changing can be assessed. The evaluation provided insight into aspects of the program that are working smoothly and some aspects that offer opportunities for improvement. This section highlights the main lessons learned from the evaluation. Recommendations developed from this evaluation are included because they support program improvements. However, they are not all cost-neutral and the degree to which some can be implemented may depend on the availability of funds or the ability to raise more funds for the program.

Please note that this evaluation was conducted concurrently with the program being administered. The MDE continued to make changes to the program in an effort of improvement as the evaluation was progressing. Therefore, some recommendations emerged that the MDE was already addressing. In these cases, a note is provided after the recommendation to highlight how the MDE has already addressed the recommendation.

### Areas of Strength

- ***The scholarship program is reaching children from diverse families.***  
Application data shows that a higher percentage of children receiving scholarships are from communities of color compared to children of the same age statewide. In addition, some families receiving scholarships are from households whose primary language is a language other than English. The main languages other than English that these families speak include Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. (In addition to English, MDE provides the scholarship application in these three languages).
- ***Providers generally report they have good relationships with their regional administrators.***  
Providers reported they receive timely and accurate information from their regional administrators. In addition, they said Pathway II applications are approved in a timely fashion. In general, most regional administrators understand the invoicing and payment processes and are paid on time.
- ***Families are either already attending their program of choice or find an eligible program quickly.***  
About one-third of the parents surveyed said they were already attending a program when they applied for a scholarship. Half of the parents said they found a program in less than one month, and only five percent said it took them more than two months.
- ***Children are attending the program their parents wanted when they applied.***  
Nearly all (95%) of the parents indicated their children are attending the program of their choice.

- *Stakeholders indicated they see improvements in the program in the second year.*  
Providers and stakeholders expressed appreciation for the many changes the MDE has made to the program in its second year. They see improvement and are thankful for those changes.

## Outreach

- *Lesson: Families' main source of scholarship information is their provider.*  
Most of the interviewees and survey respondents reported parents most commonly learn about scholarships through their provider. Regional administrators are charged with the main responsibility for conducting outreach in their regions and are supported by the MDE as needed. However, only some regional administrators are directly serving as the primary resource to parents. In most regions, the providers are the main information source on scholarships for parents, and parents have limited, if any, knowledge about the regional administrator. The parent survey results indicated many parents did not know there was a regional administrator they could contact for assistance. In light of providers functioning as the most common information source for scholarships in many regions, some regional administrators expressed concern that not all providers have a thorough understanding of the scholarships and may be providing incorrect information to parents in some cases.

- 19. Recommendation:** Regional administrators should strengthen their outreach processes, particularly with providers in their region. The focus of this work should be to ensure that accurate information is reaching the providers. Regional administrators should also contact providers who assist families to complete their applications in the event that there are errors in the application. This would help educate providers about the program. The MDE should work with regional administrators on developing methods for conducting this outreach in their regions.

## Communication

- *Lesson: Regional administrators and providers understand the MDE needs time to assess questions and issues about the program, but they also struggle with needing more timely responses from the MDE on scholarship questions.*  
The scholarship program is new and a significantly large program to implement in such a short period. The MDE has had to work quickly to resolve issues as the program is running. As with any new program, kinks must be worked out and unanticipated questions addressed. In the interviews and surveys, regional administrators and providers were sensitive to the demands MDE staff have been under in working through the implementation of the program and addressing issues as they arise. They acknowledged that in many cases the MDE responds quickly. However, many interviewees and survey respondents also reported they struggle with the time it can take the MDE to respond to their more complicated questions. They understand that often the MDE's answers to their questions have policy and process implications so they need to examine their responses. A tension exists for regional administrators when they need a quick response.

**20. Recommendation:** The MDE should continue to improve response times to regional administrators.

- *Lesson: The MDE communicates with regional administrators much useful information, but regional administrators find there are too many communications and they are not organized by a system. When they need specific information, they struggle to find it.*

**21. Recommendation:** The MDE should develop a process to communicate information in a way that is easily accessible to regional administrators and can be kept up to date. One example is to develop a portal that regional administrators have access to and can be updated on a scheduled timeline.

### **Scholarship Materials/Application**

- *Lesson: Scholarship materials, including the application, are not easy for some parents to access.*

Although most providers surveyed reported parents are able to easily access scholarship materials, one-quarter of providers indicated that scholarship materials are not easy to access. In addition, about one-third of the parents reported they needed assistance from their provider to complete the application. Although these proportions may seem low, it warrants concern about the general ease of accessing the materials and completing the application. The results indicate that this is more likely to be an issue in the Metro area (seven county area), rather than Greater Minnesota. Language is likely a common barrier to completing the application. Over the life of the program, the MDE has worked with regional administrators to refine the scholarship materials and application. As expected, when implementing a new program, the materials have gone through iterations in an effort to continuously improve the final products.

- *Lesson: The income eligibility section of the application is particularly challenging for parents to complete accurately.*

Providers, regional administrators, and stakeholders indicated the income eligibility section creates the most problems for parents to complete. Some regional administrators reported that a large percentage of their time is spent tracking down missing or inaccurate information in this section of the application. Parents are frequently not sure what documentation to attach. By nature, the process to verify income can be onerous and complicated. The MDE is limited in their ability to simplify this section of the application while also collecting the information necessary to verify income. Therefore, a tension exist between simplifying this section and meeting requirements for income verification. This tension is common for programs requiring income verification; it is challenging and complex.

**22. Recommendation:** The MDE should continue their work finding areas where the scholarship materials and application can be simplified

*Note: The MDE has made many changes to the applications since the first version based on feedback from regional administrators and providers. Some changes occurred after providers were surveyed in the*

*fall of 2014. Changes included translation of applications, including renewal and supplemental information for both Pathways, into Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. The MDE has also shortened the application by requesting only the information required to award scholarships and legal information and consent language required by data practices. The number of pages has been reduced from ten in the original application to five in the current version.*

**23. Recommendation:** The MDE should explore the benefits and costs of developing a system for applications to be completed and submitted online.

- **Lesson: *The timing of the release of the scholarship application and materials creates challenges for regional administrators and providers. However, the MDE's timing for releasing scholarship materials is constrained by the timing of the legislative session.***

The majority of providers, stakeholders, and regional administrators interviewed and surveyed strongly indicated the timing of distribution of the scholarship application and materials creates significant challenges for them. The timing affects the number of families that can be reached, the method of reaching them, and provider budgeting and planning. The timing has created staffing problems as well as problems communicating with parents. For context, since the scholarship program was created, there have been two additional legislative sessions. Each session could have changed policy language and both added funding, expanding the geographic scope of early learning scholarships. The timing of the end of the legislative sessions impeded updating materials in a timely enough fashion to be available prior to the July 1 start of a new fiscal year.

**24. Recommendation:** The MDE should continue their work exploring options for releasing the applications and outreach materials earlier and use experience from each year to develop applications and materials that are less dependent on legislative changes.

### **Invoicing/Billing**

- **Lesson: *Providers need more detailed information on invoices so they can track billing per child.*** The regional administrators do not provide invoice information at the per child level so providers often struggle to reconcile their records with the invoice. This makes it difficult to track the balance for each child.

**25. Recommendation:** The MDE should ensure the Early Learning Scholarship Administration System (ELSA) is capable of accommodating invoicing that reports out at the per child level.

*Note: The MDE developed ELSA with the capability to report out at the per child level. ELSA was distributed to regional administrators in January 2015.*

- **Lesson: *Providers appreciate flexibility in invoicing.*** Although most regional administrators reported offering billing schedules other than monthly, some stakeholders in Greater Minnesota emphasized the importance of this flexibility to small providers in particular.

**26. Recommendation:** Regional administrators should review their billing schedule to assess if they can increase flexibility, within reason.

- **Lesson: Regional administrators are challenged by forecasting scholarship funds.**  
The system of awarding the full scholarship amount is frustrating to many regional administrators because it ties up money that may not be spent and that could potentially fund more children. No regional administrator has a well-developed system for balancing awards versus actual spending. Most are managing it on a case-by-case basis, tracking balances monthly and assessing how much risk their own organization can take on while also tracking the waitlist. This was a major issue for most regional administrators in terms of efficiency.

**27. Recommendation:** The MDE should work with the regional administrators to develop a system or guidelines for planning and forecasting scholarship funds more formally to ensure the most children are able to access the scholarships.

*Note: The MDE provided forecasting guidance in the latest version of the regional administrator's manual which is in draft form to be finalized and made available January 2016.*

- **Lesson: Regional administrators want more training on how to verify income and identify fraud on applications and provider claims.**

**28. Recommendation:** The MDE should develop and provide training for regional administrators on verifying income and identifying fraud.

## Data Issues

- **Lesson: The Parent Aware renewal data does not include information on which providers have scholarship children.**

This was a major concern among staff at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) in terms of how it impacts their ability to specifically reach out to scholarship providers with expiring ratings. The concern is that some scholarship providers may not understand that their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve. If a provider with scholarship children loses their Parent Aware rating, the family must find another provider. There are two databases: one maintained by the DHS that tracks the Parent Aware facilities, and the other maintained by the MDE that tracks the scholarship children. The DHS has a system in place for alerting all Parent Aware providers well in advance as their rating nears expiration. However, the Parent Aware database does not track which providers have scholarship children due to data privacy laws; therefore, they are not able to specifically reach out to scholarship providers in addition to the general notice they receive.

**29. Recommendation:** The MDE and DHS should work together within data practice standards to identify improvements in their systems and messaging to ensure scholarship providers are communicated with when their ratings are expiring.

**30. Recommendation:** The MDE should develop a system for notifying regional administrators as scholarship providers in their region are approaching their Parent Aware renewal date. Based on this system, regional administrators should contact each scholarship provider with expiring Parent Aware ratings directly to ensure they are aware that their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve.

**31. Recommendation:** Regional administrators should ensure scholarship providers are, in general, aware that their rating status affects their scholarship eligibility and the scholarship children they serve.

- **Lesson:** *Regional administrators want a database that will manage all the scholarship information required to run the program and produce required reports.*

*Note: ELSA (made available to regional administrators in January 2015) has the capability to report at the child and program levels. In addition, ELSA has filter and sort options specifically for reporting scholarship information.*

**32. Recommendation:** As ELSA is made available to regional administrators, the MDE should ensure there is sufficient training for regional administrators.

*Note: The MDE has provided training at each regional administrator meeting since January 2015 and conducted frequent webinars for all ELSA users.*

**33. Recommendation:** The MDE should establish a system to gather feedback on ELSA from regional administrators and consider making changes based on that feedback.

*Note: The MDE has actively sought feedback on ELSA at quarterly meetings. In addition, the MDE added an ELSA project manager in December 2014 who is responsible for coordinating user experience with the development of software timelines, protocol, and capabilities.*

## **Parent Aware**

- **Lesson:** *Small childcare providers in less populated areas may be particularly challenged with maintaining their Parent Aware rating or may be less motivated to pursue a rating given their staffing challenges.*

Given the lack of providers in some areas of Minnesota, it will be important for the MDE to understand exactly how the Parent Aware rating system is incentivizing small childcare providers in Greater Minnesota to participate in Parent Aware and scholarships.

**34. Recommendation:** The MDE should develop a plan with Parent Aware for gathering input from small childcare centers and family providers in Greater Minnesota to learn how the Parent Aware program is affecting them.

- **Lesson:** *There is confusion about which organization needs to have a Parent Aware rating when in a provider partnership.*

Some providers may partner with other organizations to provide care. The stakeholders who raised this issue were concerned about how it will affect the efforts already underway for aligning programs, especially in Greater Minnesota, where there has been a considerable effort in aligning programs. The MDE has developed and communicated guidelines to handle these situations; however, some confusion remains.

- 35. Recommendation:** The MDE should work with the DHS to ensure providers are aware of and understand Parent Aware rating within partnerships.

### **Pathway II**

- **Lesson:** *Regional administrators need more training and communication on Pathway II.*

Regional administrators expressed difficulties with administering Pathway II. Their main concern was they do not have the answers to many of the questions providers ask them.

Regional administrators are instructed to direct these questions to the MDE. However, regional administrators find that providers often contact them for assistance, rather than the MDE. They also perceive that when the MDE does work directly with a provider or with other regional administrators to clarify an issue, the MDE often does not communicate the resolution to the regional administrators.

**Recommendation:** When working through Pathway II issues, the MDE should communicate the issue and the resolution with regional administrators so information is consistent and the regional administrators are informed when they do get Pathway II calls.

December 15, 2015

## **Appendix A: Scholarship Application**

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# EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

## APPLICATION FOR PATHWAY I - EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

### CHILD INFORMATION (CHILDREN APPLYING FOR SCHOLARSHIP)

Complete tables below for all children applying for a scholarship who live at the same address. Make copies of this page to add more children. Siblings are children who share one or both parents through blood, marriage or adoption, including siblings as defined by the child's tribal code or custom.

#### CHILD ONE

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:		*LEGAL MIDDLE NAME ("N/A" if none):	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY):			*GENDER (Check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>RACE (Optional – Check all that apply):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<b>ETHNICITY (Check one):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic / Latino	
Name the Early Learning Program your child is enrolled in now? (if any):			Early Learning Program Phone Number:
Do you need help choosing a program? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			Is this child currently In Foster Care? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

#### CHILD TWO (Younger sibling must attend same program as a 3- or 4-year old sibling.)

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:		*LEGAL MIDDLE NAME ("N/A" if none):	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY):			*GENDER (Check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>RACE (Optional – Check all that apply):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<b>ETHNICITY (Check one):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic / Latino	
Is this child currently enrolled in the same Early Learning Program as CHILD ONE? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			Is this child currently In Foster Care? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

#### CHILD THREE (Younger sibling must attend same program as a 3- or 4-year old sibling.)

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:		*LEGAL MIDDLE NAME ("N/A" if none):	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY):			*GENDER (Check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>RACE (Optional – Check all that apply):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<b>ETHNICITY (Check one):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic / Latino	
Is this child currently enrolled in the same Early Learning Program as CHILD ONE and CHILD TWO? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			Is this child currently In Foster Care? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No



## FAMILY INCOME INFORMATION

### IMPORTANT - BEFORE YOU BEGIN THIS SECTION –

- If you indicate you are participating in one of the public program listed under “OPTION 1” - YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS FORM THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS THAT DEMONSTRATES PARTICIPATION IN A PUBLICLY FUNDED PROGRAM (i.e. a copy of an official letter or authorization form from the public program).
- if you elect to validate your income eligibility by completing “OPTION 2” - YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS FORM THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS THAT DEMONSTRATIONS VALID PROOF OF INCOME (i.e., a recent tax form, W-2 form, two most recent pay stubs, a financial aid statement/document, or a document from an employer on company letterhead).

### OPTION 1: DO YOU ALREADY RECEIVE ONE OF THE PROGRAMS LISTED BELOW?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Food Support (SNAP)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP) | <input type="checkbox"/> Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) by family income<br><input type="checkbox"/> Head Start<br><input type="checkbox"/> Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations<br><input type="checkbox"/> Foster Care |
|--|---|

**IF YOU CHECKED ANY BOXES ABOVE FOR OPTION 1 AND CAN PROVIDE DOCUMENTATION, THEN GO TO PAGE 5.**

### OPTION 2: IF YOU OPTED TO VALIDATE YOUR INCOME ELIGIBILITY, THEN COMPLETE SECTION BELOW:

**Step A. List all children in your household. Total Children \_\_\_\_\_**

Use this option ONLY if your children are NOT currently participating in one of the programs listed in OPTION 1 above.

List all sources of income in the tables below. Include all children and adults living in your household, even if they are not related; include yourself; include a household member who is temporarily away, such as a college student. Write in how often each income is received: weekly (W), biweekly (BW), twice per month (TM), monthly (M), or yearly (Y). **Do not write in an hourly wage.** If the income fluctuates, write in the amount normally received. For farm or self-employment income only, list net income (take-home pay).

First Name	Last Name	Age	Regular income received for this child (e.g., Social Security Income)
			\$ per
			\$ per
			\$ per

**Step B. List all adults in your household, related or not. Total Adults \_\_\_\_\_**

First Name	Last Name	√ if No Income	Gross Wages/Salaries (before deductions)	Pension, SSI, Retirement, Social Security	Public Assistance, Child Support, Alimony	Unemployment, Worker's Comp, Strike Benefits	Other Income, including net Farm/Self-Employment
			\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per
			\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per

First Name	Last Name	√ if No Income	Gross Wages/Salaries ( <b>before</b> deductions)	Pension, SSI, Retirement, Social Security	Public Assistance, Child Support, Alimony	Unemployment, Worker's Comp, Strike Benefits	Other Income, including <b>net</b> Farm/Self-Employment
			\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per

**Step C. Proof of Income.** Attach proof of all income for each household member listed in the table above. Acceptable proof of income includes a recent tax form, W-2 form, two most recent pay stubs, a financial aid statement, or a statement from an employer on company letterhead.

## AGREEMENT AND CONSENT

### AGREEMENT TO COMPLY WITH REQUIREMENTS

Please initial each item below to confirm that you have read and agree to the requirements.

**All items must be initialed in order to qualify for an Early Learning Scholarship.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ My three- to five-year-old must complete an Early Childhood or preschool screening within 90 calendar days of receiving or starting a program using a scholarship. I understand screening is not required for children younger than three years old, unless the child turns three while receiving the scholarship. ***How will you verify screening has taken place? (choose one of the two options below):***
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator will contact the school district office to validate the screening location and date.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child's screening was completed at: \_\_\_\_\_ (location) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child will remain eligible to receive a scholarship until he/she is age-eligible for kindergarten, as long as state funding is available. (No child may be awarded more than one scholarship in a 12-month period.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will notify the Regional Administrator when my child stops attending the program where we are using a scholarship and will comply with the required notification period per contract/agreement with the program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will notify the Regional Administrator if I move.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child must be enrolled in a participating Parent Aware program within 10 months of being awarded an Early Learning Scholarship or scholarship will be canceled. Effective July 1, 2016, programs must have a rating of 3 or 4 stars to be eligible to receive scholarships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If my Provider is no longer participating in Parent Aware, or does not receive a rating of 3 or 4 stars by July 1, 2016, I may not be able to continue to use the Early Learning Scholarship for that program. If this happens, the Regional Administrator can help me choose a new program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The information on this application is true, and all household members' income is reported. I understand that if I purposely give false information, my child may lose the scholarship and I may need to reimburse the state for funds already paid.

### REQUIRED CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION

You **must** consent to all three of the following to participate in the scholarship program. Please **initial each one** to confirm that you have read and agree with each statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator may share my child/children's name, address, date of birth and gender, and my name and address as listed on the application, as well as any scholarship amount my child is deemed eligible for and the award date, with the Provider.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator may share my child/children's name, address, date of birth and gender, and my name and address as listed on the application with my local school district, for purposes of assigning my child a unique Statewide Student Identification (SSID) number to be used by the Regional Administrator and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to identify my child and validate scholarship payments.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator may share information from this application with MDE including my name and address; demographic information; parent education; income information; my child's eligibility for and the amount of any Early Learning Scholarship; the program where I am using my scholarship; my child's SSID number; and whether or not I have complied with program requirements.

***Note: I do not have to consent to this sharing of my information, but if I choose not to, I understand my child/children will not be able to participate in the Pathway I - Early Learning Scholarship Program. Information to be released does not include supporting documents attached to this application.***

### OPTIONAL CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION AND PARTICIPATE IN AN EVALUATION

Please initial to confirm that you have read and agree to the following. ***This consent is optional and is not required to receive a scholarship.***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator or MDE may share information from my application, my child's eligibility for and amount of any Early Learning Scholarship, and the program where I use my scholarship, with MDE authorized program evaluators for purposes of analyzing how funds are spent, how families are informed about the program, and the program's impact on child development or school readiness, the quality of early learning programs where

scholarships are used, and other evaluations deemed relevant by MDE. No public report will include specific identifying information about any individual child.

## TENNESSEN WARNING FROM THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### What information are we requesting?

We are requesting all information on the Pathway I - Early Learning Scholarships program application, some of which may be considered private data under Minnesota law.

### Why do we ask you for this information?

Information on this application is required to apply for the Pathway I - Early Learning Scholarships program. We will use the information collected here, and any additional related information, to determine eligibility for the program. This information is necessary to comply with the state law authorizing the program.

### Am I required to provide this data?

There is no legal obligation for you to provide the data requested; however, without it, we cannot determine your child's eligibility and your child will not receive a scholarship.

### Who else may see this information?

You need to consent to us sharing your information with the provider that you choose your resident school district, and the Minnesota Department of Education. If you provide your optional consent, a third-party entity will evaluate the effectiveness of the scholarship program for us. The evaluator is bound by Minnesota's data practices and privacy laws and must not share your data with anyone except MDE.

We may also give the data you've provided to the legislative auditor, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and/or other agencies with the legal authority to access the information, or anyone authorized by a court order.

### How else may this information be used?

We may use or release this information only as stated in this notice, unless you give us your written permission to release the information for another purpose or to another individual or entity. The information may be used for another purpose if the U.S. Congress or the Minnesota Legislature passes a law allowing or requiring it.

### How long will my data be kept?

Your data will be kept for a minimum of seven years.

### **AGREEMENT AND CONSENT: SIGNATURE REQUIRED**

By initialing one or more of the items in the Agreement and Consent section above, I agree to the program requirements and/or release of information, and agree that I have read and understand the above Tennessee Warning.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT, LEGAL GUARDIAN OR FOSTER CARE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE:

DATE:

FIRST NAME (print):

LAST NAME (print):

FOSTER CARE AGENCY NAME (if applicable):

CHILD (RENS) RESIDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (ONLY IF CHILD IS IN FOSTER CARE):

## REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

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Mail completed Pathway I scholarship application and REQUIRED documents (as indicated at the top of page 3) to:

## EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

### AWARD FORM FOR PATHWAY II - EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

#### CHILD INFORMATION (CHILDREN APPLYING FOR SCHOLARSHIP)

Complete tables below for all children applying for a scholarship who live at the same address. Make copies of this page to add more children. Siblings are children who share one or both parents through blood, marriage or adoption, including siblings as defined by the child's tribal code or custom. **Your children must be enrolled in a Pathway II - Early Learning Scholarship Program.**

#### CHILD ONE

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:	*LEGAL MIDDLE NAME ("N/A" if none):	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY):		*GENDER (Check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>RACE (Optional – Check all that apply):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<b>ETHNICITY (Check one):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic / Latino
IS THIS CHILD CURRENTLY IN FOSTER CARE? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

#### CHILD TWO (Younger sibling must attend same program as a 3- or 4-year old sibling.)

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:	*LEGAL MIDDLE NAME ("N/A" if none):	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY):		*GENDER (Check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>RACE (Optional – Check all that apply):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<b>ETHNICITY (Check one):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic / Latino
IS THIS CHILD CURRENTLY IN FOSTER CARE? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

#### CHILD THREE (Younger sibling must attend same program as a 3- or 4-year old sibling.)

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:	*LEGAL MIDDLE NAME ("N/A" if none):	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY):		*GENDER (Check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>RACE (Optional – Check all that apply):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<b>ETHNICITY (Check one):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic / Latino
IS THIS CHILD CURRENTLY IN FOSTER CARE? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

PATHWAY II PROGRAM NAME WHERE MY CHILD/ CHILDREN WILL ATTEND:	PROGRAM PHONE NUMBER:
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## PARENT / LEGAL GUARDIAN INFORMATION

**Complete the information on this page if you are the parent or legal guardian of the child applying for a Pathway II - Early Learning Scholarship.** Note: If the child is in foster care, please list the name and address of the agency overseeing the foster care placement in the "Home Address" section below.

*LEGAL FIRST NAME:	MIDDLE INITIAL:	*LEGAL LAST NAME:
*RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Agency <input type="checkbox"/> Worker <input type="checkbox"/> Other:		
*HOME ADDRESS:	*CITY:	*ZIP CODE:
MAILING ADDRESS (if different from home address):	CITY:	ZIP CODE:
*DATE OF BIRTH (if under 21) (MM/DD/YYYY):	*COUNTY:	
*PHONE NUMBER:	OTHER PHONE NUMBER:	
EMAIL ADDRESS:		

### RESIDENTIAL STATUS

**Is your family currently residing in any of the following? Check any that apply.**

- Shelter                     
  Doubling up temporarily with other family or friends due to economic hardship  
 Car, outside, public space, hotel, or motel due to lack of accommodation

### EDUCATION INFORMATION

**What is the highest level of education you have completed? Check one:**

- Less than high school                     
  High School or GED  
 Some college, no degree                     
  College degree or more

### EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

**What is your current employment status? Check one:**

- Employed Full-Time (at least 25 hours/week)                     
  Employed Part-Time (less than 25 hours/week)  
 Unemployed, seeking employment                     
  Unemployed, not seeking employment

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**What language does your family speak most at home?**

- English     
  Spanish     
  Somali     
  Hmong     
  Vietnamese  
 Other:

**Do you need an interpreter?**                       Yes                       No

Is there another adult you want to list on this award form? (By listing this person, you give your consent for the Regional Administrator to contact this adult to discuss the information on this award form.)

FIRST NAME:	MIDDLE INITIAL:	LAST NAME:
PHONE NUMBER:		RELATIONSHIP TO YOU:

## FAMILY INCOME INFORMATION

### IMPORTANT - BEFORE YOU BEGIN THIS SECTION –

- If you indicate you are participating in one of the public program listed under “OPTION 1” - YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS FORM THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS THAT DEMONSTRATES PARTICPATION IN A PUBLICLY FUNDED PROGRAM (i.e. a copy of an official letter or authorization form from the public program).
- if you elect to validate your income eligibility by completing “OPTION 2” - YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS FORM THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS THAT DEMONSTRATIONS VALID PROOF OF INCOME (i.e., a recent tax form, W-2 form, two most recent pay stubs, a financial aid statement/document, or a document from an employer on company letterhead).

### OPTION 1: DO YOU ALREADY RECEIVE ONE OF THE PROGRAMS LISTED BELOW?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Food Support (SNAP)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP) | <input type="checkbox"/> Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) by family income<br><input type="checkbox"/> Head Start<br><input type="checkbox"/> Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations<br><input type="checkbox"/> Foster Care |
|--|---|

**IF YOU CHECKED ANY BOXES ABOVE FOR OPTION 1 AND CAN PROVIDE DOCUMENTATION, THEN GO TO PAGE 5.**

### OPTION 2: IF YOU OPTED TO VALIDATE YOUR INCOME ELIGIBILITY, THEN COMPLETE SECTION BELOW.

**Step A. List all children in your household. Total Children \_\_\_\_\_**

**Reminder: Use this option ONLY if your children are NOT currently participating in one of the programs listed in OPTION 1 above.**

List all sources of income in the tables below. Include all children and adults living in your household, even if they are not related; include yourself; include a household member who is temporarily away, such as a college student. Write in how often each income is received: weekly (W), biweekly (BW), twice per month (TM), monthly (M), or yearly (Y). **Do not write in an hourly wage.** If the income fluctuates, write in the amount normally received. For farm or self-employment income only, list net income (take-home pay).

First Name	Last Name	Age	Regular income received for this child (e.g., Social Security Income)
			\$ per
			\$ per
			\$ per

**Step B. List all adults in your household, related or not. Total Adults \_\_\_\_\_**

First Name	Last Name	√ if No Income	Gross Wages/ Salaries (before deductions)	Pension, SSI, Retirement, Social Security	Public Assistance, Child Support, Alimony	Unemployment, Worker's Comp, Strike Benefits	Other Income, including net Farm/ Self-Employment
			\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per

First Name	Last Name	√ if No Income	Gross Wages/ Salaries ( <b>before</b> deductions)	Pension, SSI, Retirement, Social Security	Public Assistance, Child Support, Alimony	Unemployment, Worker's Comp, Strike Benefits	Other Income, including <b>net</b> Farm/ Self-Employment
			\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per
			\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per	\$ per

**Step C. Proof of Income.** Attach proof of all income for each household member listed in the table above. Acceptable proof of income includes a recent tax form, W-2 form, two most recent pay stubs, a financial aid statement, or a statement from an employer on company letterhead.

## AGREEMENT AND CONSENT

### AGREEMENT TO COMPLY WITH REQUIREMENTS

Please initial each item below to confirm that you have read and agree to the requirements.

**All items must be initialed in order to qualify for an Early Learning Scholarship.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ My three- to five-year-old must complete an Early Childhood or preschool screening within 90 calendar days of receiving or starting a program using a scholarship. I understand screening is not required for children younger than three years old, unless the child turns three while receiving the scholarship. ***How will you verify screening has taken place? (choose one of the two options below):***
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator will contact the school district office to validate the screening location and date.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child's screening was completed at: \_\_\_\_\_ (location) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child will remain eligible to receive a scholarship until he/she is age-eligible for kindergarten, as long as state funding is available. (No child may be awarded more than one scholarship in a 12-month period.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will notify the Regional Administrator when my child stops attending the program where we are using a scholarship and will comply with the required notification period per contract/agreement with the program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will notify the Regional Administrator if I move.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My child must be enrolled in a participating Parent Aware program within 10 months of being awarded an Early Learning Scholarship or scholarship will be canceled. Effective July 1, 2016, programs must have a rating of 3 or 4 stars to be eligible to receive scholarships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If my Provider is no longer participating in Parent Aware, or does not receive a rating of 3 or 4 stars by July 1, 2016, I may not be able to continue to use the Early Learning Scholarship for that program. If this happens, the Regional Administrator can help me choose a new program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The information on this application is true, and all household members' income is reported. I understand that if I purposely give false information, my child may lose the scholarship and I may need to reimburse the state for funds already paid.

### REQUIRED CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION

You **must** consent to all three of the following to participate in the scholarship program. Please **initial each one** to confirm that you have read and agree with each statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator may share my child/children's name, address, date of birth and gender, and my name and address as listed on the application, as well as any scholarship amount my child is deemed eligible for and the award date, with the Provider.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator may share my child/children's name, address, date of birth and gender, and my name and address as listed on the application with my local school district, for purposes of assigning my child a unique Statewide Student Identification (SSID) number to be used by the Regional Administrator and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to identify my child and validate scholarship payments.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator may share information from this application with MDE including my name and address; demographic information; parent education; income information; my child's eligibility for and the amount of any Early Learning Scholarship; the program where I am using my scholarship; my child's SSID number; and whether or not I have complied with program requirements.

***Note: I do not have to consent to this sharing of my information, but if I choose not to, I understand my child/children will not be able to participate in the Pathway I - Early Learning Scholarship Program. Information to be released does not include supporting documents attached to this application.***

### OPTIONAL CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION AND PARTICIPATE IN AN EVALUATION

Please initial to confirm that you have read and agree to the following. ***This consent is optional and is not required to receive a scholarship.***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Administrator or MDE may share information from my application, my child's eligibility for and amount of any Early Learning Scholarship, and the program where I use my scholarship, with MDE authorized program evaluators for purposes of analyzing how funds are spent, how families are informed about the program, and the program's impact on child development or school readiness, the quality of early learning programs where

scholarships are used, and other evaluations deemed relevant by MDE. No public report will include specific identifying information about any individual child.

## TENNESSEN WARNING FROM THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### What information are we requesting?

We are requesting all information on the Pathway II - Early Learning Scholarships program application, some of which may be considered private data under Minnesota law.

### Why do we ask you for this information?

Information on this application is required to apply for the Pathway II - Early Learning Scholarships program. We will use the information collected here, and any additional related information, to determine eligibility for the program. This information is necessary to comply with the state law authorizing the program.

### Am I required to provide this data?

There is no legal obligation for you to provide the data requested; however, without it, we cannot determine your child's eligibility and your child will not receive a scholarship.

### Who else may see this information?

You need to consent to us sharing your information with the provider that you choose your resident school district, and the Minnesota Department of Education. If you provide your optional consent, a third-party entity will evaluate the effectiveness of the scholarship program for us. The evaluator is bound by Minnesota's data practices and privacy laws and must not share your data with anyone except MDE.

We may also give the data you've provided to the legislative auditor, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and/or other agencies with the legal authority to access the information, or anyone authorized by a court order.

### How else may this information be used?

We may use or release this information only as stated in this notice, unless you give us your written permission to release the information for another purpose or to another individual or entity. The information may be used for another purpose if the U.S. Congress or the Minnesota Legislature passes a law allowing or requiring it.

### How long will my data be kept?

Your data will be kept for a minimum of seven years.

## AGREEMENT AND CONSENT: SIGNATURE REQUIRED

By initialing one or more of the items in the Agreement and Consent section above, I agree to the program requirements, to the release of information, and agree that I have read and understand the above Tennessee Warning.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT, LEGAL GUARDIAN OR FOSTER CARE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE:

DATE:

FIRST NAME (print):

LAST NAME (print):

FOSTER CARE AGENCY NAME (if applicable):

(Pathway II Program Verification and Child's Award Start Date Information are on page 7)

I acknowledge that the required information on this Pathway II – Early Learning Scholarship Award Form and required income documentation have been reviewed and approved as true for the purpose of placement in an available Pathway II - Early Learning Scholarship slot within our program. I also acknowledge that we have discussed Early Learning Scholarships options and benefits with the parent(s)/family and that they have accepted a Pathway II scholarship from our program.

<b>SIGNATURE OF PROGRAM REPRESENTATIVE:</b>		<b>DATE:</b>
<b>FIRST NAME (print):</b>	<b>LAST NAME (print):</b>	
<b>CHILD CARE / EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM NAME:</b>	<b>TITLE:</b>	

<b>CHILD OR CHILDREN’S LEGAL NAME</b>	<b>CHILD’S AWARD START DATE</b>

**\*Please be sure the required income verification documents are on file to validate eligibility, see page 3).**

## Appendix B: Regional Administrator Interview Questions

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1. What is your role in administering the Early Learning Scholarship program?

### Informing Families about scholarship

2. Do you use the materials provided by MDE for conducting outreach or have you created your own? Why or why not?
  - a. If using MDE materials- Are materials helpful in conducting outreach for the scholarship program?
3. What challenges do you find in developing an effective outreach plan?
4. What strategies have you used to reach culturally and linguistically diverse families and providers?
5. How do you ensure scholarships are distributed to all counties in your region?

### Assist Families in Completing the Application

6. What percent of families need assistance completing their application? What percent of staff time does this take?
7. How do you let families know you are available to help?
8. Is there a part of the application that families are more likely to need assistance with?

### Determining Eligibility

9. Describe your process for verifying eligibility?
10. Do you have the resources available to you to easily validate/verify program issues?
11. Have you encountered fraud in any applications? Do you have any procedures in place for handling fraud (birthdate, income, etc.)?
12. What is your process for creating waitlists and determining priority?

### Finances

13. Approximately, how many scholarships have you awarded in Pathway I? Pathway II?
14. Did you spend all your FY2014 funds?
15. Currently what percent of your funds are awarded? What percent are expended?
16. To what extent have you been able to fully and accurately award the appropriate scholarship amounts to families?

### Notification

17. Describe your notification process.
18. Are there any communication issues between you and the providers?
19. Are there communication issues between you and the families?

### Program Selection Assistance

20. How informed, on average, are families about the eligible providers?
21. How much assistance do you provide families on average?

22. Do you use the Parent Aware Weekly Rating Program List? Is the list accurate and timely?

### **Coordinating with Programs**

23. Describe your relationships with your providers by provider type (childcare, school districts, Head Start).
24. Have you run into any issues with providers not adhering to approved uses of scholarship funds? If so, what percentage of your time is spent on this?
25. Describe your process for verifying each provider has completed a Scholarship Program Participation Agreement Form?
26. How often do providers submit invoices (monthly, quarterly)?
27. Do you believe providers understand the payment/invoicing process?
28. Have you been able to make timely payments to providers?
- a. If no, what are your barriers?
  - b. If yes, what has helped you?
29. Have you encountered fraud in any of the provider claims? Do you have procedures in place for handling fraud?
30. Describe any additional scholarship policies you have in place, such as child attendance, split program costs, or guardianship of foster children?
31. Describe your process for verifying that each child completes a developmental screening?

### **General Questions**

32. What are the main activities you spend your time on related to Early Learning Scholarships? What percentage of time do you spend on each activity?
- o Examples:
    - \_\_\_ Outreach
    - \_\_\_ Helping families complete their applications
    - \_\_\_ Verifying application information
    - \_\_\_ Notifying families of eligibility
    - \_\_\_ Assisting families in choosing a provider
    - \_\_\_ Coordinating with providers
    - \_\_\_ Dealing with issues of fraud
    - \_\_\_ Verifying each child has completed development screening
    - \_\_\_ Other?
33. What additional resources would be most useful to you in administering the program?
34. Does the 8 percent admin fee cover the cost of administering the program?
35. In terms of administration, and specific to each Pathway, what are the strengths of the Early Learning Scholarship program? What areas could use improvement? Suggestions for improvements?
36. What are the challenges in administering both Pathway I and Pathway II programs concurrently?
37. In your opinion, are the Early Learning Scholarships administered efficiently/effectively?
38. Regional administrators administer Pathway I scholarships for an entire Governor's Economic Development Region. Are these regions the right size for an administrator to handle or is a different size better?

## Appendix C: Provider Survey

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Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important survey!

The purpose of this survey is to gather information from childcare providers on the administration of the Early Learning Scholarship (scholarship) program. We're interested in better understanding the strengths of the program as well as learning where it can be improved. This survey is voluntary and will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please submit your completed survey by Wednesday, February 18 at 5:00 p.m.

Tips for using this survey:

- If you cannot complete the survey at one time, you can exit the survey and return to where you paused to finish.
- To reset your answers on a page, use the "Reset" button. To go back to a previous page, use the "Back" button.
- If you would prefer a text based version of the survey (for example, if you use a screen reader), click on the "text only" link on the center of the top of the screen.

Any information that you provide is considered private data under the Minnesota Data Practices Act (Minnesota Statutes §13.64). All survey responses will be kept on a secure server. All responses will be aggregated and no information will be reported that could identify an individual. If you have any technical problems with the survey, please contact Vince Vu at (651) 259-3813 or [Vincent.Vu@state.mn.us](mailto:Vincent.Vu@state.mn.us).

Thank you for your time!

To begin the survey, click the "Next" button below.

This survey is being administered by Management Analysis & Development (MAD), a division within Minnesota Management & Budget that provides neutral, third-party consultation to public sector organizations. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has retained MAD to conduct the survey and prepare a summary report for MDE.

1. Which of the following describes your role at your facility(ies) (check all that apply):

- Director
- Administrator
- Owner
- Teacher
- Administrative Support
- Other, Please specify:

2. Please indicate which scholarship type(s) families at your facility(ies) use:

- Pathway I
- Pathway II
- Both Pathway I and Pathway II

3. How many Pathway I sites do you oversee?

4. Approximately how many children currently attend your facility(ies) on a Pathway I Early Learning Scholarship?

- (select 1 through 25+)
- I don't know
- None

If more than 25, please specify the number of children at your facility(ies) on a Pathway I Early Learning Scholarship?

*(Several questions in this survey refer to a "regional administrator." The regional administrator is the person who coordinates Early Learning Scholarships on behalf of the Minnesota Department of Education in each region of the state.)*

**Pathway I Provider Questions:**

5. How common are the following ways families who receive Pathway I scholarships learn about the Early Learning Scholarship program?

*Respondents chose from this list for each question 5 option:*

- *Very Common*
- *Somewhat Common*
- *Neither Common nor Uncommon*
- *Somewhat Uncommon*
- *Very Uncommon*
- *I Don't Know*

- Your facility staff
- Print outreach materials from your regional administrator
- Print outreach materials from the Minnesota Department of Education
- Minnesota Department of Education regional administrator's website
- Word of mouth from other families
- Face-to-face contact with a regional administrator at an event such as parent/child expo, county fair, etc.
- Social or community services staff
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_

6. For Pathway I, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

*Respondents chose from this list for each question 6 option:*

- *Strongly Agree*
- *Agree*
- *Neither Agree nor Disagree*
- *Disagree*
- *Strongly Disagree*
- *I Don't Know*
- *Not Applicable*

- The Early Learning Scholarship program and materials are easy to access and readily available for families and programs.
- Families are able to easily complete the Early Learning Scholarship application on their own.
- Eligible families receive Early Learning Scholarship funds when they apply for them.
- I receive timely technical assistance in a professional manner.
- I receive accurate technical assistance in a professional manner.
- My facility(ies) has a good relationship with our regional administrator
- Our regional administrator communicates well with us about issues related to the Early Learning Scholarship program.
- The invoice and payment process established by our regional administrator is clear to us.
- The payments we receive from our regional administrator are timely (made within 30 days).
- Administering the Early Learning Scholarship program in tandem with other assistance programs (e.g., CCAP) is straightforward.

7. Approximately what percentage of parents generally need your assistance in completing their applications for Pathway I scholarships?

- 75% - 100%
- 50% - 74%
- 25% - 49%
- 1% - 24%
- None
- I don't know

8. What sections of the application do they most often need assistance with? (Choose all that apply.)

- Applicant Information
- Income Verification
- Signatures
- Early Education/Childcare Program Choice
- Agreement and Consent
- Other, please specify:

9. What sections of the application do they most often need assistance with?
- Applicant Information
  - Income Verification
  - Signatures
  - Early Education/Childcare Program Choice
  - Agreement and Consent
  - Other, please specify:
10. Approximately what percentage of assistance needs to be referred to the regional administrator?
- 75% - 100%
  - 50% - 74%
  - 25% - 49%
  - 1% - 24%
  - None
  - I don't know
11. Estimate the percentage of your facility's/families with a Pathway I Early Learning Scholarship who were already attending your facility(ies) when they applied for the scholarship:
- 75% - 100%
  - 50% - 74%
  - 25% - 49%
  - Less than 25%
  - I don't know
12. In terms of the administration of the Early Learning Scholarship program Pathway I scholarships, what is working well?
13. In terms of the administration of the Early Learning Scholarship program Pathway I scholarships, what needs improvement?

**Pathway II Provider Questions:**

14. How many Pathway I sites do you oversee? \_\_
15. Approximately how many children currently attend your facility(ies) on a Pathway II Early Learning Scholarship?
- (select 1 through 25+)
  - I don't know
  - None

If more than 25, please specify the number of children at your facility(ies) on a Pathway I Early Learning Scholarship?

16. To the best of your knowledge, how common are the following ways that families receiving Pathway II scholarships learn about the Early Learning Scholarship program:

*Respondents chose from this list for each question 5 option:*

- *Very Common*
- *Somewhat Common*
- *Neither Common nor Uncommon*
- *Somewhat Uncommon*
- *Very Uncommon*
- *I Don't Know*

- Your facility staff
- Print outreach materials from your regional administrator
- Print outreach materials from the Minnesota Department of Education
- Minnesota Department of Education regional administrator's website
- Word of mouth from other families
- Face-to-face contact with a regional administrator at an event such as parent/child expo, county fair, etc.
- Social or community services staff
- Other
- Please specify:

17. For Pathway II, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

*Respondents chose from this list for each question 6 option:*

- *Strongly Agree*
- *Agree*
- *Neither Agree nor Disagree*
- *Disagree*
- *Strongly Disagree*
- *I Don't Know*
- *Not Applicable*

- The Early Learning Scholarship program and materials are easy to access and readily available for families and programs.
- Families are able to easily complete the Early Learning Scholarship application on their own.
- I receive timely technical assistance in a professional manner.
- I receive accurate technical assistance in a professional manner.
- My facility(ies) has a good relationship with our regional administrator.
- Our regional administrator communicates well with us about issues related to the Early Learning Scholarship program.
- The invoice and payment process established by our regional administrator is clear to us.
- The payments we receive from our regional administrator are timely (made within 30 days).

- Administering the Early Learning Scholarship program in tandem with other assistance programs (e.g., CCAP) is straightforward.
- When submitting Pathway II applications to our regional administrator, we get timely confirmation on applicant eligibility.
- Pathway II dollars help our facility(ies) provide expanded and/or improved services to children.

18. Approximately what percentage of parents need your assistance in completing their applications for Pathway II scholarships?

- 75% - 100%
- 50% - 74%
- 25% - 49%
- 1% - 24%
- None
- I don't know

19. What sections of the application do they most often need assistance with?

- Applicant Information
- Income Verification
- Signatures
- Early Education/Childcare Program Choice
- Agreement and Consent
- Other, please specify:

20. Approximately what percentage of assistance needs to be referred to the regional administrator?

- 75% - 100%
- 50% - 74%
- 25% - 49%
- 1% - 24%
- None
- I don't know

21. Estimate the percentage of your facility's/facilities' families with a Pathway II Early Learning Scholarship who were already attending your facility(ies) when they applied for the scholarship:

- 75% - 100%
- 50% - 74%
- 25% - 49%
- Less than 25%
- I don't know

22. Approximately what percentage of your Pathway II scholarship dollars fund the following eligible uses at your facility(ies)?

Program Expansion:

- 75% - 100%
- 50 - 74%
- 25% - 49%
- 1% - 24%
- None
- I don't know

Program Enhancement

- 75% - 100%
- 50 - 74%
- 25% - 49%
- 1% - 24%
- None
- I don't know

23. *If respondent selects program enhancement:* Are any Pathway II scholarship dollars spent on the following eligible uses for program enhancement?

- a. Offering comprehensive services that are responsive to children's needs to improve learning outcomes focused on opportunities for family engagement and parenting education
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
- b. Incorporating compensatory instructional services to accelerate literacy and language development
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
- c. Coordination of transition to kindergarten and the early grades with the local school
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
- d. Other, please specify:

24. If you have questions or issues that arise related to Pathway II scholarships, who do you contact first?

- MDE staff

- Your regional administrator
- I don't know
- Other, please specify:

25. Please describe your process for assisting families in completing Pathway II applications.

26. In terms of the administration of the Early Learning Scholarship program Pathway II scholarships, what is working well?

27. What is your Parent Aware rating?

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- I don't know

28. Are you pursuing a higher rating?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

29. Were you a Parent Aware rated program before participating in the Early Learning Scholarship program?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

30. If did not participate in Parent Aware before scholarship, did you pursue a Parent Aware rating in order to participate in the Early Learning Scholarship program?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

31. Are you aware that on July 1st, 2016, only programs with active ratings of 3 or 4 will be eligible to receive Early Learning Scholarships?

- Yes
- No

32. How often do you communicate with families regarding information about their scholarship (e.g., the amount spent, programmatic changes that might affect their scholarship, how far the scholarship is projected to last)?

- Weekly
- Monthly

- Quarterly
- When asked
- Never
- Other, Please specify:
- I don't know

33. What percentage of children who receive Early Learning Scholarships at your facility(ies) combine the scholarship with other subsidies (e.g., CCAP) to pay for the cost of your program?
- 75% - 100%
  - 50% - 74%
  - 25% - 49%
  - Less than 25%
  - I don't know

34. What percent of families request materials in a language other than English?
- 75% - 100%
  - 50% - 74%
  - 25% - 49%
  - 1% - 24%
  - None
  - I don't know

If language request > 1%: Which languages? \_\_\_\_\_

35. Approximately how many children would not be able to attend your facility(ies) without some form of assistance, such as the Early Learning Scholarship or CCAP?
- All
  - Most
  - Some
  - Few
  - None
  - I don't know

36. Are there any other comments you would like to include about the administration of the Early Learning Scholarship program?

You have completed the survey! Thank you!

Please click on the "submit" button below to submit your survey.

## Appendix D: Parent Survey

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### Pathway I Parent Survey:

1. Before getting this survey, did you know that your child was receiving an Early Learning Scholarship?
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. How did you learn about the Early Learning Scholarships? (Select all that apply)
  - From my early childhood provider
  - From my local administrator
  - At an event (for example, a county fair)
  - From another parent
  - I don't know
  - N/A
  
3. If you learned about the Early Learning Scholarships from someone else, who?
  
4. Did you know that there is a local administrator who can help you with your Early Learning Scholarship, including filling out the application or choosing an early childhood provider?
  - Yes
  - No
  
5. Did you complete the Early Learning Scholarship application?
  - Yes, without any help.
  - Yes, with help from my early childhood provider.
  - Yes, with help from my local administrator
  - Yes, with help from someone else
  - No, I did not complete the application
  - I don't know
  
6. If someone else helped you with your application, who was it?
  - Was the application easy or hard to fill out?
  - Very easy
  - Somewhat easy
  - Neither easy nor hard
  - Somewhat hard
  - Very hard
  - I didn't fill it out
  - I don't know
  
7. If it was hard to fill out the application, why?

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8. Is your child going to the program that you wanted when you applied for the scholarship?
  - Yes
  - No
9. If your child is attending a program different from the one you wanted, why?
10. How long did it take you to find an eligible early childhood provider?
  - Less than 1 month
  - 1-2 months
  - 3-4 months
  - 4-6 months
  - More than 6 months
  - I was already in a program
  - I don't know
11. How often does your provider update you on the balance of your child's scholarship?
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
  - Quarterly
  - When I ask for an update
  - Never
  - I don't know
  - Other, please specify:
12. Is there anything else you would like us to know about how the Early Learning Scholarship program is run?

Thank you for taking the survey!

**Pathway II Parent Survey:**

1. Before getting this survey, did you know that your child was receiving an Early Learning Scholarship?
  - Yes
  - No
2. How did you learn about the Early Learning Scholarships? (Select all that apply)
  - From my early childhood provider
  - At an event (for example, a county fair)
  - From another parent
  - I don't know
  - N/A
3. If you learned about the Early Learning Scholarships from somewhere else, where?

4. Did you complete the Early Learning Scholarship application?
  - Yes, without any help.
  - Yes, with help from my early childhood provider.
  - Yes, with help from someone else
  - No, I did not complete the application
  - I don't know
5. If someone else helped you with your application, who was it?
6. Was the application easy or hard to fill out?
  - Very easy
  - Somewhat easy
  - Neither easy nor hard
  - Somewhat hard
  - Very hard
  - I didn't fill it out
  - I don't know
7. If it was hard, why?
8. Is your child going to the program that you wanted when you applied for the scholarship?
  - Yes
  - No
9. If your child is attending a program different from the one you wanted, why?
10. How often does your provider update you on the balance of your child's scholarship?
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
  - Quarterly
  - When I ask for an update
  - Never
  - I don't know
  - Other, please specify:
11. As far as you know, which of the following activities is your child's Early Learning Scholarship funding? (Select all that apply)
  - Tuition/parent's fees
  - Better services
  - More activities
  - Other, please specify:
  - I don't know
12. Is there anything else you would like us to know about how the Early Learning Scholarship program is run?

Thank you for taking the survey!

## **Appendix E: Stakeholder Interview Questions**

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### **Provider Questions:**

1. How do families generally learn about the Early Learning Scholarship?
2. Do they generally need assistance completing the application?
  - a. If they need assistance, who helps them complete their application?
  - b. What sections are the most problematic?
3. What interaction do you have with your regional administrator?
  - a. How is the communication?
  - b. Are invoices paid on time?
  - c. Is the invoice process clear to you?
  - d. Do you receive technical assistance when you need it?
4. Have you had any issues specific to the administration of Pathway 1 scholarships? Pathway 2? Are there any particularly problematic components to Pathway 2?
5. How is the administration working when the Early Learning Scholarship is combined with another subsidy?
6. How is income eligibility determined?
7. Overall what is working well with the administration of the scholarship? What are areas of the administration of the scholarship that could be improved?

### **Association Questions:**

1. How does the administration of the scholarships impact the programs/providers you represent?
2. Do you hear from your members about aspects of the program that are working well in terms of administration? Not working well? Suggested changes?
3. How do your members feel about being Parent Aware rated?
  - a. Are there barriers they see to getting rated?
  - b. Has the Early Learning Scholarship been an incentive for your members to get a Parent Aware rating?
4. How do families generally learn about the Early Learning Scholarship?
5. Do they generally need assistance completing the application?
  - a. If they need assistance, who helps them complete their application?
  - b. What sections are the most problematic?
6. What interaction do you or the providers you represent have with your regional administrator?
  - a. How is the communication?
  - b. Are invoices paid on time?
  - c. Is the invoice process clear to you?
  - d. Do you receive technical assistance when you need it?
7. Have you had any issues specific to the administration of Pathway 1 scholarships?
8. Do you have any suggestions for making Pathway 2 scholarships more accessible to family childcare?

9. How is the administration working when the Early Learning Scholarship is combined with another subsidy?

**Childcare Aware:**

1. How has the administration of the Early Learning Scholarship impacted Childcare Aware?
2. What interaction does Childcare Aware have with regional administrators?

**DHS Questions:**

1. What are your impressions of how the Early Learning Scholarship is being administered?  
Specific to each Pathway?
  - a. What is working well?
  - b. What areas need improvement?
2. How well is the administration of the scholarship working with Parent Aware and CCAP?

**MDE Questions:**

1. In terms of what you hear from the field:
  - a. What are your impressions of how the Early Learning Scholarship is being administered? Specific to each Pathway?
  - b. What is working well?
  - c. What areas need improvement?
2. In terms of internal MDE administration of the scholarship:
  - a. What are your impressions of how the Early Learning Scholarship is being administered? Specific to each Pathway?
  - b. What is working well?
  - c. What areas need improvement?

**MN Initiative Foundations:**

1. How do families generally learn about the Early Learning Scholarship?
2. Do they generally need assistance completing the application?
  - a. If they need assistance, who helps them complete their application?
  - b. What sections are the most problematic?
3. From what you hear from providers in your area, are you aware of any issues specific to the administration of Pathway I scholarships? Pathway 2?
4. How have the regional administrators been interacting with your families and communities?
5. What outreach is working/ not working?
6. What are your thoughts on why there are some counties without waitlists?