

Milwaukee YoungStar Survey Shows a Mixture of Optimism and Anxiety

Executive Summary:

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families conducted a 17 question phone survey of Milwaukee child care providers in Summer and Fall 2011. We focused on both licensed and certified family providers with Wisconsin Shares clients, and participating in YoungStar (Wisconsin's new child care Quality Rating and Improvement System—QRIS), who were either not yet rated or at the two star level. Out of more than 150 who were contacted, we were able to get 50 to respond, including African American, Hmong, and Spanish-speaking providers.

Our questions centered on YoungStar implementation, including: general knowledge/impressions, individual program improvement and goals, concerns about the rating system, areas where they are in need of the most help, and open ended comments. Overall, it appears that respondents were more positive in their scaled (1-5, agree/disagree) answers than in their comments. The comments revealed more skepticism, worries, and of course personal stories. The anecdotes ranged from celebrations of success to frustration and misconceptions:

**"I took all the classes already.
I was one of the first to do Youngstar"**

"I am worried that daycares will be shutdown."

**"They're trying to scare people.
They should be more positive."**

It is possible our results were skewed somewhat by the fact that we only have data from providers who were willing to answer the phone and then spend time talking with us. There may have been more negative comments and fear about YoungStar expressed if we had been able to hear from those who we called but could not get a response, but it is impossible to know for sure.

Although some of the facts and opinions given by the providers were inaccurate, farfetched or overly optimistic, we believe there

is a good deal of information here that is useful. The quantitative results give a meaningful snap shot of how providers see this new program. The candid comments give us valuable insight on barriers, use of resources, enthusiasm or lack thereof, criticisms, and suggestions for improvement.

Data and Methodology:

YoungStar was launched in November 2010. We created the survey questions for the case study as a way to learn about barriers and solutions to engaging Milwaukee child care providers at relatively low levels of quality (as determined by YoungStar) in order to improve their quality of care. What didn't work well was finding and contacting providers to engage in the interview process. When we began the selection process, the DCF website was not nearly as operational and comprehensive as it is now. The data bases we had available were full of inaccuracies. Thus we attempted to contact more than 150 Milwaukee County providers in order to find the 50 who completed our phone survey. This was of course frustrating but not unexpected. We ended up making a total 191 phone calls. The text of the survey is included here as an attachment.

Sample Characteristics:

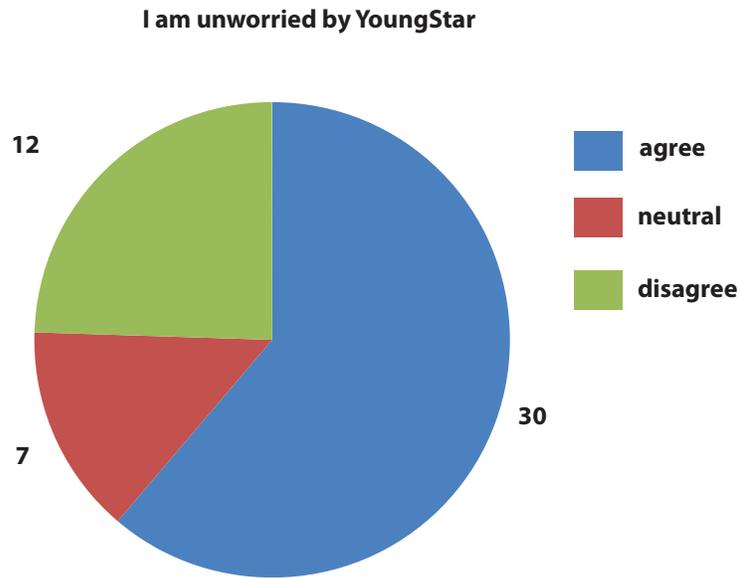
Almost all of the providers who participated were licensed family child cares. All of them are in Milwaukee County. About one fifth were certified home child cares. There was one "Not Yet Rated" as of February 2012, and a handful of "Not Participating in YoungStar". Every single program that was already rated was at the two star level. And the vast majority of those providers chose to receive an automated rating, so they are listed at zero points on the YoungStar website. Those that opted for an onsite rating had up to nine or ten points, but it takes 11 points to get to three stars (plus some minimum requirements in each area).

Demographically, the sample included several Spanish speaking providers, as well as some who speak Hmong. There was a wide range of locations geographically. There was also a mix of ages and years of experience. All of the providers interviewed were female.

Key Findings:

1. Optimistic and Positive, though somewhat unrealistic

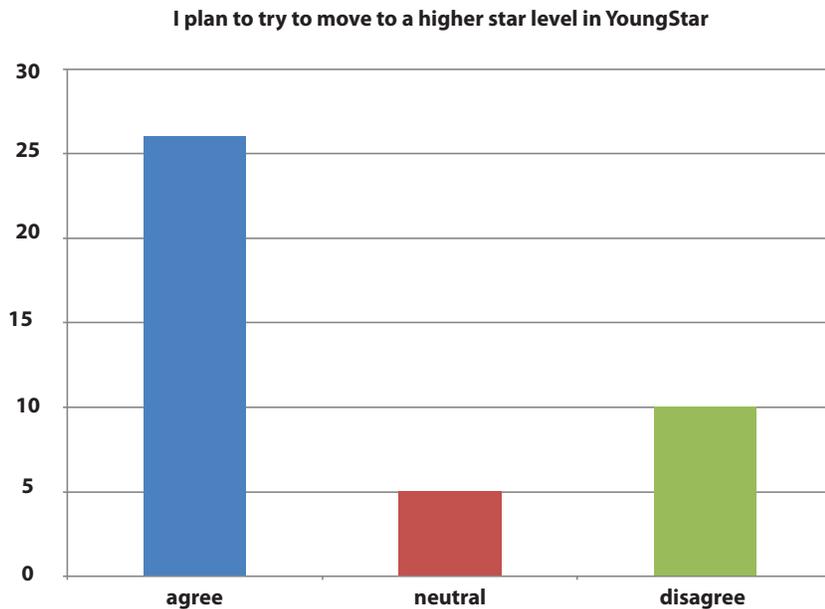
Overall, child care providers were more optimistic and positive about YoungStar than we would have expected. 30 out of 49 either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am unworried by YoungStar.”



Many of them seem to be willing to give the new program a try and anticipate that it will result in positive outcomes.

“(YoungStar) is a great program. It weeds out the bad daycares and helps the good daycares. It will be good for the children.”

However, many of these respondents may have unrealistic expectations in terms of advancing up the rating scale. Out of the 41 providers who gave an answer to the question of whether they plan to move to a higher star level, 32 chose four or five stars as their goal. While it is great that they aspire to providing the highest quality of care, we believe that the barriers to achieving four or five stars are significant (e.g. educational requirements) and thus will be quite difficult to obtain for most providers.



2. Confused and Anxious

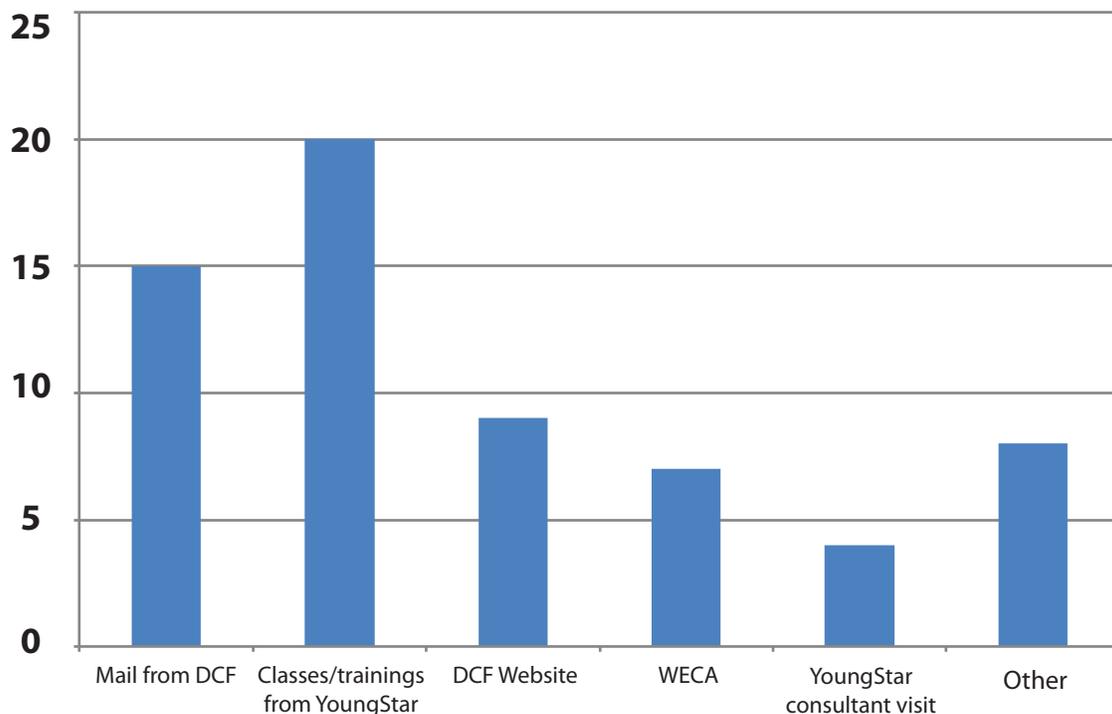
While many are more optimistic than we expected, there was also a significant level of anxiousness:

- a. *Licensing*
There is uncertainty about new requirements and enforcement under the QRIS.
“I am confused on who is supposed to do what license? The county? YoungStar?”
- b. *Payments*
There is uncertainty about eligibility and continued reimbursements.
“If program is not a 3 star, will they be shut down or will they not get W2 payments? I’m confused.”
- c. *Anti-fraud*
There is anxiety about overzealous anti-fraud efforts.
“They are always trying to threaten providers.”
- d. *YoungStar requirements*
There is confusion about the point system and what it takes to move up on the five star rating scale. There are two different sets of criteria for group and family providers, but not everyone is aware of this.
“(YoungStar) should have separate requirements for family.”

3. What would help them most

Two areas where providers identified the biggest need for help were funding (micro-grants) and general information about YoungStar’s point system and expectations.

Question 2: Where did you get your information about YoungStar?





Many also chose technical consultation about learning environment and curriculum as well as business and professional practices. A few people brought up their need for translators and the lack of available bi-lingual materials. Comments include:

“Where am I supposed to get money from to help further my education and improve?”

“Need to learn how to organize a business--YoungStar has helped.”

“I don’t have money to buy expensive toys.”

4. Barriers

Providers who we talked to were able to delineate numerous obstacles to achieving success within YoungStar. These included: challenging educational requirements, language issues, lack of trust, lack of money, age, disinterest on the part of parents, perceived unfairness, lack of time, no available resources, and general confusion with all the details of this new system. A lot of the providers mentioned various aspects of (mis)communication with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), YoungStar technical consultants, and/or their licensors. Comments about the educational requirements included:

“I don’t have the education. The rating system is unfair. My center has all the requirements but I don’t have a college degree.”
“I feel the 15 hours we get now is enough. I’m too old to go through all that education.”

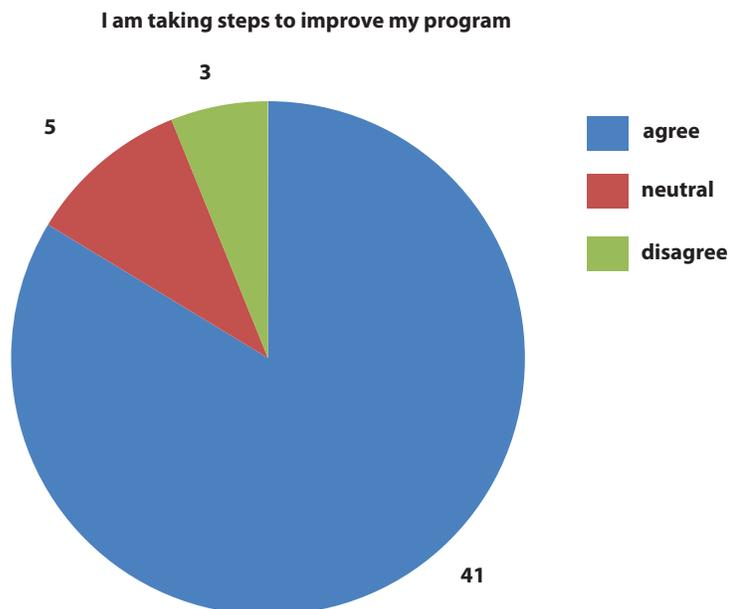
Future Work:

Although the case study and analysis are completed, there are two additional steps that are in progress--

1. We are doing follow up interviews with 10 of the 50 providers. This will give us an even better picture of these individuals and their needs. The interview focuses on specific demographic information, attainment of college credits, details of future improvement plans, and also offers the respondent another chance to make in depth comments.
2. We are creating a dissemination plan for both the case study and YoungStar progress reports. This is the key component where our independent research will be shared with the implementers and help lead to our overall goal of increasing successful participation in YoungStar.

Conclusion:

We are encouraged by the many positive and thoughtful survey responses from Milwaukee family child care providers. At least when given a chance at self-assessment, they appear to care about quality and most think that YoungStar will be useful in that regard. Almost all (41 out of 49) agreed with the statement, “I am taking steps to improve my program.”



One provider sums up the aspirations of the program:

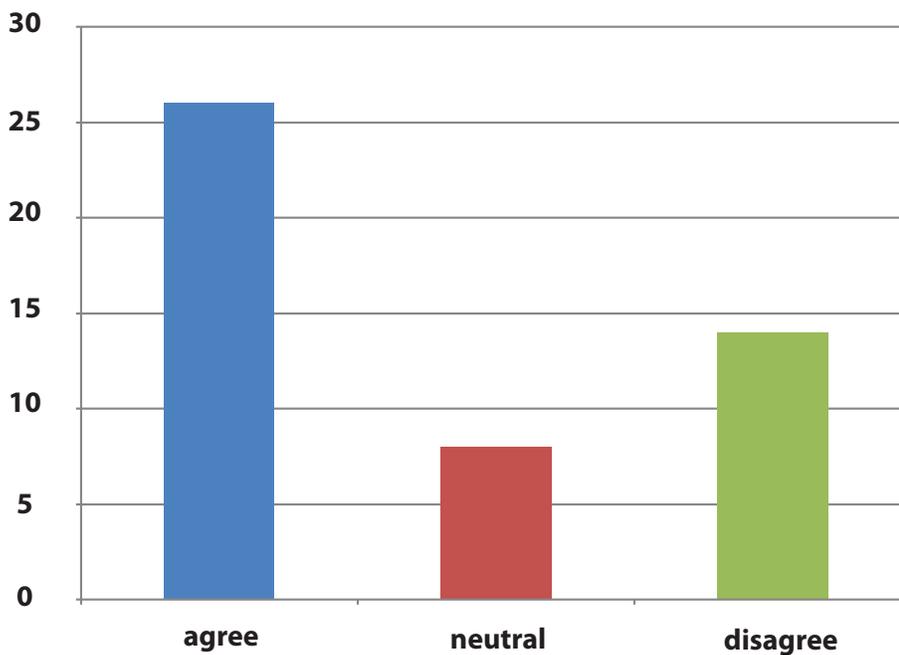
“YoungStar helps me to be more professional and improve the well-being of children and families.”

But then, there was also a healthy dose of skepticism and concern. Some of it may have been complaining and making excuses to a sympathetic ear, but many of the specific issues identified appear to be valid and include useful criticisms and suggestions for improvement. An example is the provider who said:

“I really want to comply with expectations. I feel sad that I only received two stars. I need classes on administration and others to move to the next star level. I need more information translated into Spanish.”

We are hopeful that after the information in this report is shared with DCF and the YoungStar Consortium it will inform system and process improvements to the QRIS. We have recorded the authentic voices of a large group of child care providers who are struggling with the ramifications of a changing economic and regulatory landscape. The optimism that many providers expressed reflects both their interest in making changes to improve quality as well as a willingness to work with the QRIS.

I believe YoungStar can help me create more positive outcomes for children



As we continue to evaluate the progress that providers are making, identify barriers to reaching their goals, and promoting investments to support them, we hope that their optimism will be rewarded.

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This report was written by Daithi Wolfe. The bulk of the interviews, including some in Spanish, were done by Julie Davidson. Special thanks goes to Dave Edie, Allan Goetsch, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Supporting Families Together Association, and the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association.

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Before becoming an ECE advocate, Daithi was a public elementary school teacher for 15 years at Hawthorne and Glendale Elementary Schools in Madison. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan in his native Ann Arbor, with a BA in American Culture. He earned his teaching certificate at the Upper Valley Teacher Training Program in Lebanon, NH.

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