

Research Brief

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Milwaukee County Child Care Providers Appear Ready for YoungStar

Local providers compare favorably to state as a whole

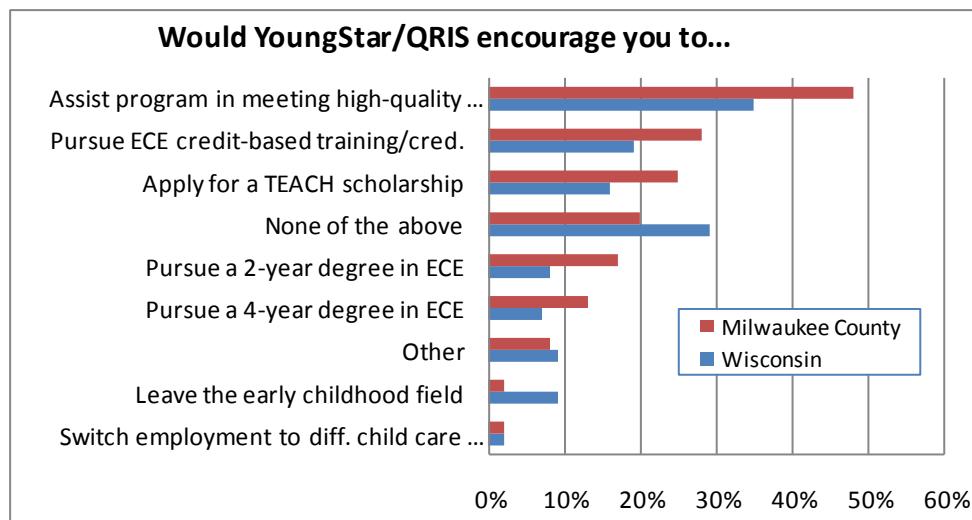
In collaboration with the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), the Public Policy Forum surveyed 1,425 child care center directors, center employees, and family child care providers statewide. The survey was designed to provide a picture of the status of Wisconsin's child care workforce in terms of educational attainment, experience, professional credentials, and wages and benefits earned. The survey results are useful in analyzing providers' readiness for the state's new child care quality improvement initiative, the YoungStar Initiative.

Compared to the state as a whole, Milwaukee County's 223 respondents demonstrate higher rates of professional memberships, use of professional development programs, and attainment of credentials. In some categories, the county sample showed higher levels of education among staff. Because many of these factors can earn a provider a higher rating under YoungStar, Milwaukee County providers may be better prepared for the new regulations in these areas.

It should be noted that these factors contribute to the "structural" quality of early childhood education, which is only part of the total quality picture. "Process" quality speaks to the quality of the interactions between the caregiver and the children, which cannot be measured in a survey. The YoungStar rating system is designed to take both structural and process quality into account when determining the overall rating of a provider by including classroom observations in the rating procedure. Therefore, while it appears many Milwaukee County providers may be *structurally* ready for YoungStar's

implementation, until we know more about the process quality of these providers, we cannot predict their likely quality ratings.

Chart 1: Opinion of YoungStar quality rating and improvement system (QRIS)



When asked their opinions about the proposed YoungStar plan, Milwaukee County providers do appear more optimistic. About a third of providers statewide agree that YoungStar would encourage them to assist their early childhood program in making quality improvements, while about half of Milwaukee County providers agree (Chart 1).

Survey methodology and limitations

In collaboration with the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), in March 2010, the Public Policy Forum mailed surveys to 7,191 regulated child care providers statewide. Recipients included all licensed group child care center directors and a geographically representative, but otherwise random, sample of licensed and/or certified family child care providers. In addition, three survey forms were sent to a geographically representative, but otherwise random, sample of licensed group child care centers, to be distributed to employees. Employees were also given the option of taking the survey online.

The survey instrument varied slightly between each survey sample, with center directors and family providers being asked additional questions about the characteristics of the children in their care and their child care programming.

Of the mailed surveys, 1,425 were completed and returned, for a statewide response rate of 20%. At a 95% confidence interval, the statewide margins of error are: +/- 3.45 percentage points for center directors, +/- 7.95 percentage points for center employees, and +/- 3.92 percentage points for family child care providers. The margins of error for sub-groups of survey respondents will be higher.

Table 1 shows the number of returned surveys by provider type.

WECA's analysis of the statewide sample was published in the report, "The Current Status of Wisconsin's Child Care Workforce," available at www.wecanaeyc.org. In this report, the Forum isolates the Milwaukee County sample and compares the results to WECA's findings for the state as a whole. Any slight differences from WECA's reported results are due to rounding and/or exclusion of

Types of providers

Certified child care providers are family child care providers who are certified by counties to serve up to six children in their own home, depending on the ages of the children. A certified provider must complete a 20-hour class as well as five hours of annual training.

Licensed child care providers are licensed by the state. The providers can be family or group providers. Licensed family providers can serve up to eight children, depending on the ages of the children. A licensed family provider must complete a 40-hour class as well as 15 hours of annual training. Licensed group providers serve nine or more children in a child care center.

missing data for a particular question.

As with all mail surveys, this one is susceptible to non-response bias. In this case, it is possible that child care providers who chose not to participate in the survey differ in significant ways from those who did participate. Whether the non-respondents are more or less likely to exhibit characteristics of structural quality is unknown; however, survey researchers often presume lower response rates from members of a survey sample on whom the survey responses are likely to reflect negatively.

Respondent characteristics

Table 2 highlights certain characteristics of the survey respondents. On the whole, the survey reveals that Wisconsin's child care providers are mostly female and over the age of 36. In addition, most are parents of dependent children, with many having two or more children at home.

Survey respondents from Milwaukee County differ significantly from respondents in the rest of the state in

Table 1: Survey respondents by provider category

	Wisconsin		Milwaukee County	
	# of respondents	% of total	# of respondents	% of total
Center Directors	610	43%	89	40%
Center Employees	255	18%	35	16%
Family Providers	560	39%	99	44%
Total	1,425	100%	223	100%

Table 2: Respondent characteristics

	Wisconsin* N=1425	Milwaukee County N=223
Over 36 years old	72%	75%
Female	96%	95%
African-American	10%	48%
Sole breadwinner	28%	45%
Parent	58%	56%
Two or more dependent children	40%	43%
Receive subsidy for own children	6%	10%
Work second job	15%	17%
Ave. years experience in child care	15	12
More than 5 years at current center	58%	54%

**Figures may differ slightly from those reported by WECA.*

that they are more likely to be the only income source for their household and they are more likely to be African-American.

It also should be noted that while **Table 2** shows the average Milwaukee County provider responding to the survey has slightly less experience than the average Wisconsin provider, **Table 3** shows that this characteristic exception is primarily attributed to family providers.

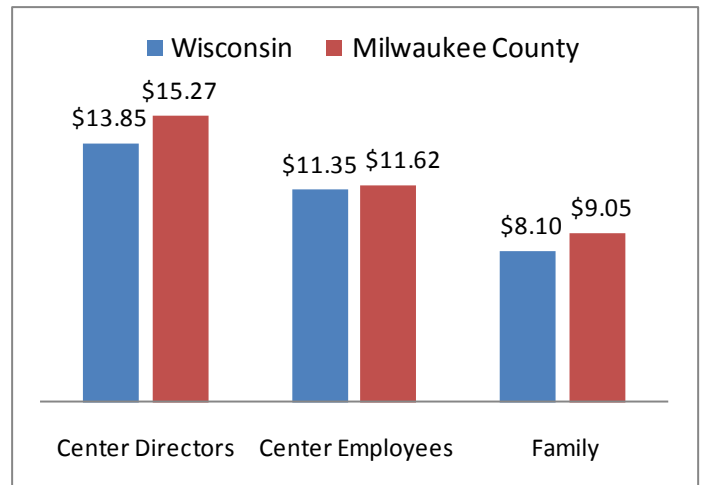
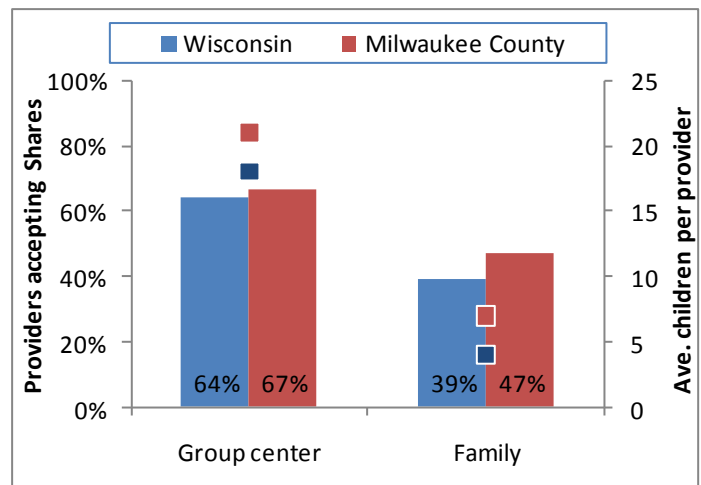
Despite similar levels of experience, reported wages tend to be higher in Milwaukee County. Survey respondents reported annual salaries and weekly hours worked; to calculate a uniform hourly wage, annual salaries were divided into hourly increments based on 52 work weeks per year. Milwaukee County child care providers report slightly higher median wages than the statewide sample (**Chart 2**).

The higher wages in Milwaukee County reflect the higher fees charged to Milwaukee County parents. Reported average weekly fees for child care are between \$15 and \$19 per week higher in Milwaukee County than statewide for group child care, and between \$27 and \$45 per week higher for family care. (These vary according to age group.) Highest average fees were for infants in Milwaukee County: \$222 per week in group care and \$200 per week in family child care.

While group providers in the county and the state served Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy recipients at

Table 3: Years experience in regulated child care

	Wisconsin	Milwaukee County
Center directors	16	15
Center employees	13	16
Family providers	14	8
Average	15	12

Chart 2: Median hourly wages**Chart 3: Use of Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy**

similar rates, Milwaukee County family child care providers were more likely to serve subsidy recipients (39% of statewide family providers vs. 47% in the county) (**Chart 3**).

What is the YoungStar initiative?

On June 23, 2010, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee approved YoungStar, a five-star rating system for child care providers. With this program, Wisconsin joins more than 20 other states that have child care quality rating and improvement systems.

Currently in the early stages of implementation, YoungStar will rate provider quality, link Wisconsin Shares subsidy rates to quality, and provide parents information about quality as they choose providers. The quality rating scale is based on five factors: education, learning environment, business practices and the health and well-being of children in care.

Participation in YoungStar is mandatory for providers who currently serve recipients of child care subsidy dollars; other providers can participate voluntarily if they agree to accept subsidized children. The quality of many providers is being assessed with a validated evaluation tool commonly in use across the country, although providers in compliance with all regulatory requirements can opt to receive an automatic 2-star rating. Providers accredited by specific national accrediting bodies receive an automatic 4- or 5-star rating, depending on the accrediting body.

According to the current five-year plan for YoungStar, providers with three, four, or five stars will earn higher reimbursement rates, while providers with two stars will receive the base subsidy, currently set at the existing rate. Providers not in compliance with regulations will earn one star and will not be eligible for reimbursement. This tiered reimbursement is intended to create an incentive for providers to improve their quality. Under the new administration of Gov. Scott Walker, the tiered reimbursement scheme may be modified.

The program design also includes training and technical assistance to help child care providers improve their quality and micro-grants for equipment purchases. The state plans to post the ratings of individual providers on a website for parents and will educate parents about the importance of choosing a high quality provider.

The state has contracted with a consortium of three organizations to administer YoungStar in each of six regions of the state: Supporting Families Together Association, Celebrate Children Foundation and the

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association.

According to the five-year plan, the consortium is responsible for: (a) delivering training and technical assistance in all six YoungStar regions; (b) rating, observing and collecting data for child care providers; (c) administering micro-grants to providers for improvements; (d) acting as a resource for providers to contact with questions about YoungStar; and (e) facilitating partnerships and investment in early care and education by private funders.

YoungStar has been estimated to cost \$63 million over six years, including \$10 million during the initial launch.

YoungStar implementation timeline

- June 23, 2010: Joint Finance Committee approves YoungStar unanimously
- June 30, 2010: Request for Proposals from potential regional administrators is released
- September 2010: Training and technical assistance begins in 12 targeted counties
- Late October 2010: RFP for regional administration awarded to statewide consortium of three organizations
- November 1, 2010: Contract with consortium begins
- November 2010: Training and technical assistance is rolled out statewide
- November-December 2010: Regional offices begin to rate providers
- December 2010: Provider ratings available for parents on YoungStar website
- July 2011: Tiered reimbursement begins
- Fall 2011: First evaluation of children by UW-Madison Waisman Center
- Spring 2012: Follow-up evaluation of children by Waisman Center
- July 2012: Before- and afterschool programs are included in YoungStar
- January 2014: Results of Waisman Center evaluation released
- January 2015: Integration of YoungStar data into Department of Public Instruction longitudinal student database

Source: Department of Children and Families

Structural quality

While “quality” itself is a subjective concept with varying definitions, early childhood education researchers distinguish between process-oriented and structure-oriented elements of child care quality. Process quality is defined by what a child actually experiences in a care setting, including difficult-to-measure facets such as the interpersonal relationship between child and caregiver, whether the caregiver responds appropriately to the child’s needs, and the richness of the learning environment. Structural quality refers to other attributes, such as regulatory status and the educational attainment, credentials, and years of experience of providers.

Because structural quality is easier to measure than process quality, structural quality elements often are the focus of regulatory efforts to improve quality. The YoungStar quality rating initiative, for example, uses several measures of structural quality in its overall ratings system.

As discussed in detail below, our statewide survey found Milwaukee County providers have higher overall scores on most elements of structural quality compared to the statewide sample. Because of YoungStar’s reliance on structural quality elements to define each rating tier, the survey results indicate that Milwaukee County providers may be positioned to do comparatively well in the quality rating process.

It is important to note that because of our inability to

measure the non-response bias potentially affecting the survey results, we cannot know for certain whether our findings are representative of Milwaukee County or Wisconsin providers on the whole with respect to structural quality. Because the non-response bias most likely would affect both the Milwaukee County and statewide samples similarly, however, we are able to compare the two samples with a high degree of confidence.

YoungStar ratings

Teacher education is considered to be one of the “most consistent predictors of quality in an early childhood setting,” according to the YoungStar plan. As such, quality ratings lean heavily on teachers’ and administrators’ credentials, credits, and degrees earned. Our survey collected information about the educational attainment and experience of providers through several measures included in the YoungStar rating system.

Credentials

Credit-based credentials earn providers points in the YoungStar rating system. In fact, certain credentials are minimal requirements in order to meet the threshold for a three-star or higher rating.

Milwaukee County providers have higher rates of earned early childhood education credentials than the statewide sample (**Chart 4**). Each credential features a credit-based sequence of specific courses, totaling between 12 and 18 credits. While neither the state nor the county sample has more than one-third of providers achieving any one credential type, Milwaukee County providers show higher rates of completing each credential category than the statewide sample.

The trend persists when examining the sub-sample of directors of child care centers—36 percent of Milwaukee County respondents and 29 percent of statewide respondents in this sub-sample have earned their administrator credential.

While research has clearly linked education and training with higher levels of child care quality, some factors unrelated to quality could impact a provider’s decision to pursue credentials. Those factors may include cost, access to institutions offering credit-based coursework, access to the Internet, or already possessing an advanced degree or training in a relevant field.

Chart 4: Credentials earned by child care providers

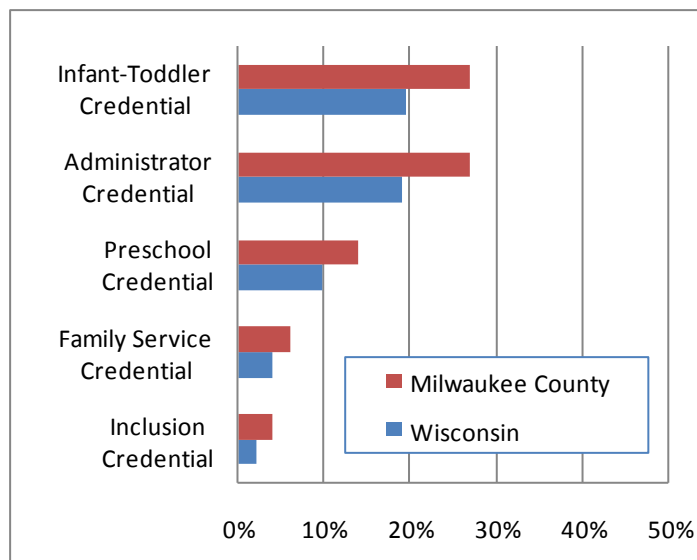
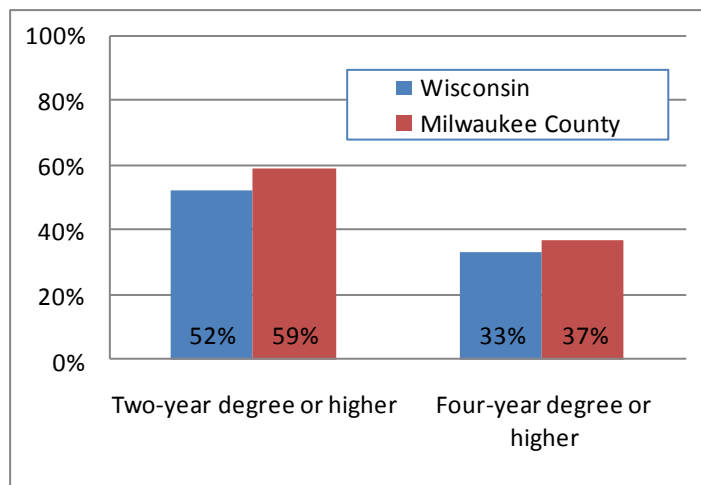


Chart 5: Educational attainment



Educational attainment

Attainment of a two- or four-year degree also contributes points under the YoungStar rating system.

Education levels are comparable between the statewide and county samples (**Chart 5**). About half of all respondents in the state and the county possess at least a two-year degree, while about a third of all respondents have at least a four-year degree.

When considering educational attainment of a two-year degree and higher according to provider type, however, disparities between the state and Milwaukee County grow. Statewide, directors are more likely to have a degree (67%) than in Milwaukee County (59%), while among center employees, Milwaukee County respondents are more likely to have a degree (71% versus 56% statewide). Among family child care providers, Milwaukee County respondents are slightly less likely to have a degree (**Chart 6**).

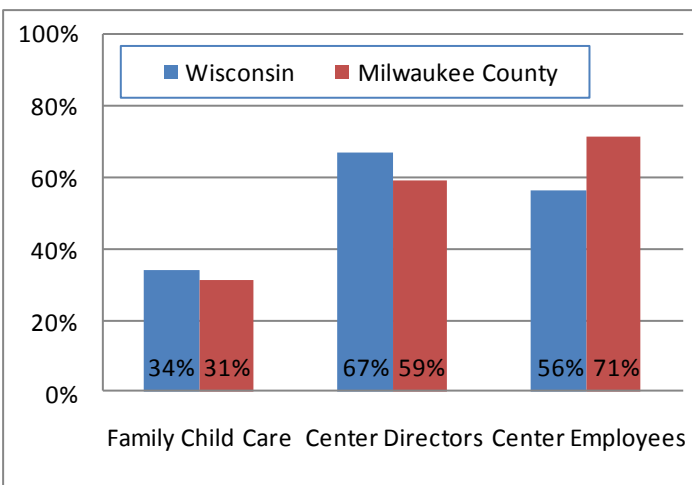
Experience

As noted previously, Milwaukee County respondents indicate similar levels of experience in child care and early childhood settings as respondents statewide (**Table 3**, page 3). Family providers in Milwaukee County, however, report less experience than family providers statewide.

Professional affiliations

Professional affiliations reflect the professionalism of the child care workforce, which may or may not influence quality within a program. Being a member of a

Chart 6: Providers with 2-year degree or higher

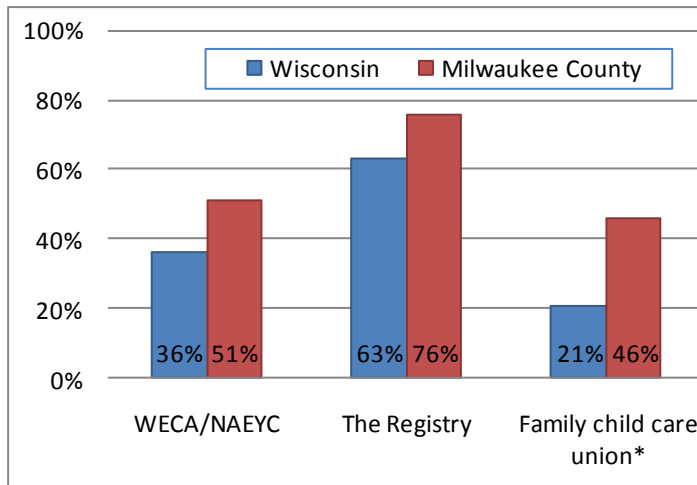


professional organization is likely to mean a provider has access to information about professional development opportunities and other quality-improvement opportunities, such as grants and scholarships. While YoungStar does not award points in the rating system for membership in professional associations, one of those organizations (The Registry) provides a service that can help providers earn a higher rating.

The Registry is Wisconsin's system for recognizing and tracking the educational qualifications of child care providers. The Registry verifies its members' qualifications by approving certain courses for content and by reviewing members' transcripts. Members of The Registry, by earning credit and/or obtaining professional development, can work their way up a career ladder consisting of a series of 17 levels of qualification.

YoungStar awards points based on these Registry levels (or their equivalent, for non-members). All staff at licensed child care centers in Wisconsin are required to be Registry members, and all early childhood programs opting to participate in YoungStar will be required to participate in The Registry.

Another important professional association for early childhood educators is the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC is a national professional association for early childhood care and education providers and teachers and an accrediting agency for early childhood programs.

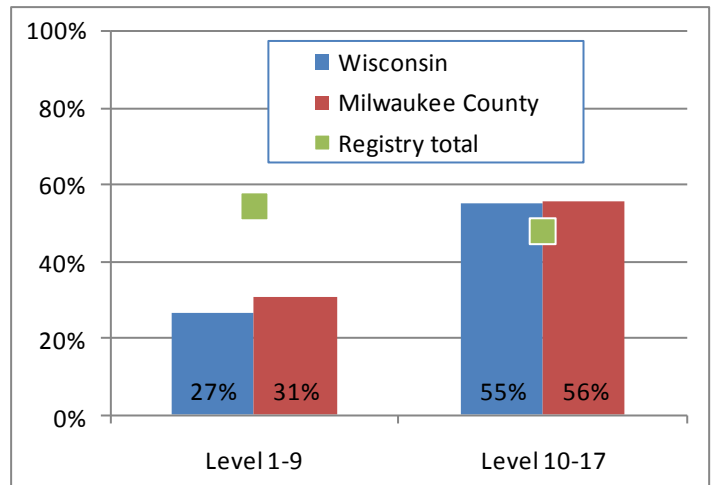
Chart 7: Professional affiliations

Milwaukee County respondents have higher rates of membership in these associations than respondents from other parts of the state (**Chart 7**). In addition, of those respondents from Milwaukee County who say they are not currently members of The Registry, 40% report having been members in the past, compared to 28% of the statewide sample.

Child care providers in Milwaukee County also report higher rates of membership in labor unions. The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which has made an effort to organize family child care providers in recent years, represents the greatest number of respondents. Overall, 46% of family child care providers in Milwaukee County and 21% of family child care providers across the state report belonging to a labor union.

Although YoungStar does not award points for membership in these organizations, providers can earn points for moving along the Registry career ladder, with more points earned for higher career levels. In fact, center directors are expected to be at level 10 or higher in order for a group center to rate three or more stars.

Chart 8 groups the center directors who responded to the survey by career level and compares them to the total Registry database of center directors. The Milwaukee County survey respondents do not differ significantly from the respondents from the rest of the state, with most being at level 10 and higher.

Chart 8: Center directors by Registry career level

Process quality

As noted above, process quality refers to the actions that take place within an early childhood program setting, particularly the interactions between the caregiver/teacher and the child. It also includes the relationship between the child care provider and the child's family. While an opinion survey of providers cannot accurately capture measures of this type of quality, certain survey responses can provide insight into process quality characteristics.

TEACH and REWARD

The TEACH and REWARD are state-funded programs designed to increase education and training among the early childhood care and education workforce in Wisconsin, so as to improve process quality and reduce turnover among early childhood staff. TEACH provides grants for providers to obtain additional training and education, and REWARD provides additional compensation to early childhood educators who attain supplementary education and remain in the field.

Milwaukee County survey respondents show higher rates of TEACH and REWARD utilization than the statewide sample (**Chart 9**, next page).

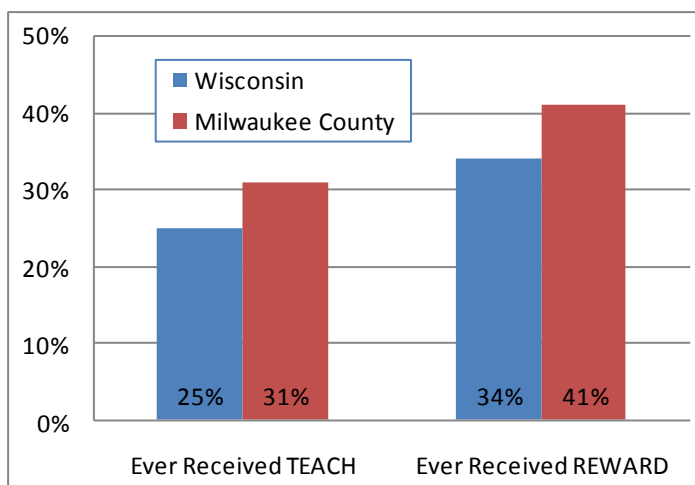
Those who had received TEACH or REWARD awards were asked whether the programs encouraged them to remain in the early childhood field. Ninety-one percent of both state and county TEACH recipients say receiving the scholarship encouraged them to remain in the field. The REWARD stipend also had an impact: 90% of stipend recipients in Milwaukee County and 81% statewide say the extra compensation encouraged them to stay in the field.

Accreditation

The YoungStar initiative will measure process quality directly via classroom observations. Evaluators will grade care and teaching practices according to an appropriate scale based on the child's age and development. In addition, YoungStar will automatically award accredited programs with the highest quality rating of five stars, recognizing that the accreditation process results in programs with high quality structure *and* process. The survey can thus capture some insight into providers' process quality by using accreditation as a proxy.

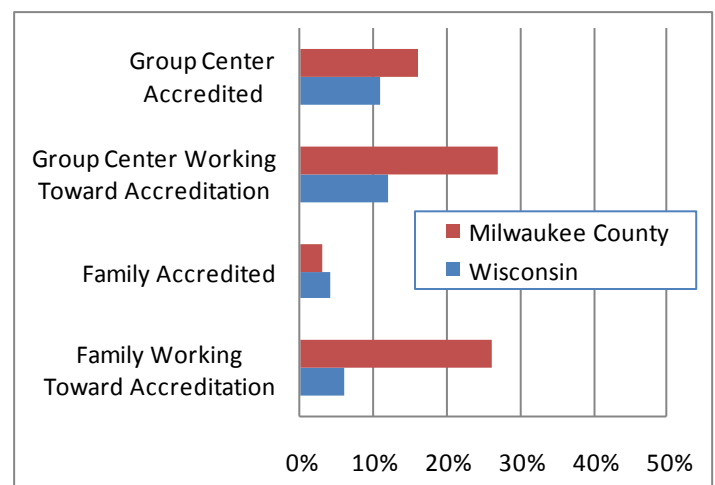
While Milwaukee County group child care centers have somewhat similar accreditation rates as compared to the statewide sample (16% in the county vs. 11% in the state), they are significantly more likely to report that they are "working toward" accreditation than the statewide sample (27% in the county vs. 12% in the state) (**Chart 10**). The two samples have similar rates of family child care provider accreditation (3% in the county vs. 4% in the state), but the county has much higher rates of family providers who are working toward accreditation (26% in the county vs. 6% in the state).

Chart 9: Support received for training



The survey also asked providers who chose not to become accredited what factors influenced their decision. The two most-cited reasons in both the state and the county samples are that accreditation is "too costly" and "unnecessary." More than half of all unaccredited group providers say the high cost of accreditation is the reason they have not pursued it. Family child care providers are more likely to see accreditation as unnecessary and not important to parents.

Chart 10: Accreditation status



Provider opinions on the impact of YoungStar

At the time the survey was administered, the YoungStar initiative had been proposed, but was not yet fully approved by the Joint Finance Committee. Survey questions sought to gauge providers' opinions of the "new, voluntary system to rate the quality of child care providers in Wisconsin."

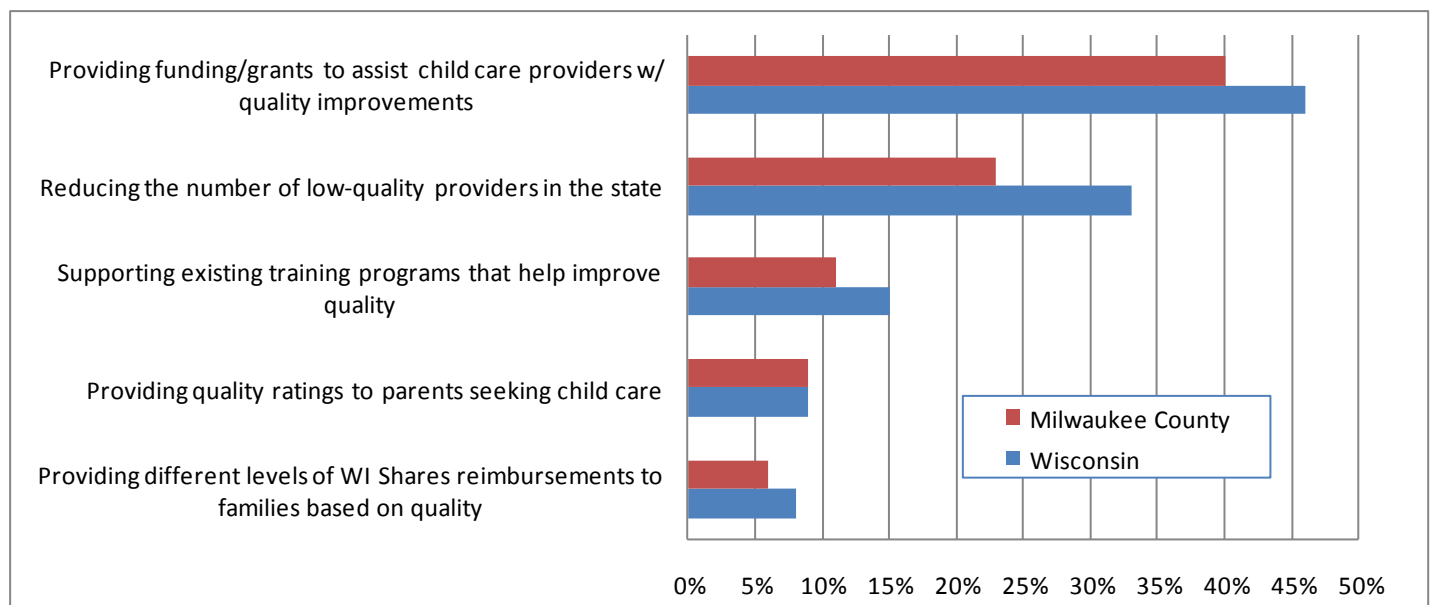
Group providers (directors and center employees) were asked to choose which out of a list of possible goals of a quality rating and improvement system was the most important. Both Milwaukee County and statewide providers cite "providing funding/grants to assist child care providers with quality improvements," as the most important goal, although none of the options garnered support from a majority of respondents (**Chart 11**). Very few group providers see providing information to parents as the most important goal.

Chart 1 on the first page of this report shows that almost half of Milwaukee County respondents feel a quality ratings and improvement system would encourage them to assist their program in making quality improvements. Overall, very few providers feel the new rating system would cause them to leave the early childhood field.

Chart 12 shows the responses of just the family providers to that same question. As with the overall sample, among family providers, the Milwaukee County respondents are more optimistic about the potential impacts of YoungStar than those statewide.

One explanation for this stark difference of opinion may be the fact that significantly fewer family providers in the rest of the state serve children receiving the child care subsidy (see **Chart 3** on page 3). As YoungStar will be voluntary for those providers not serving subsidized families, these providers may not see the rating system as having much effect on them.

Chart 11: Most important goal of a quality rating and improvement system to group centers



Conclusion

Child care quality has no single definition or recipe. While researchers have identified certain factors, such as teacher education, that lead to measurable improvements in child outcomes, some components of quality are challenging to measure and rate, such as the warmth of a caregiver.

YoungStar assigns the points that make up its quality ratings based on a variety of factors, some of which correspond to elements of structural quality. The Milwaukee County providers responding to this survey demonstrate higher proficiency in certain structural quality elements, which could give them an advantage in some categories of YoungStar ratings. It is unknown how local providers will fare when all of the elements of the quality ratings are totaled. It is also unknown if parents and caregivers feel the ratings accurately portray their personal views on the components of quality child care.

Milwaukee County providers appear poised to take positive action based on the new quality rating policy. Many report being encouraged by quality ratings to pursue training and education. This may reflect the fact that more Milwaukee County providers accept families

receiving a child care subsidy, as participation in YoungStar is voluntary for programs not serving Wisconsin Shares recipients. Even so, policymakers should be prepared for varying reactions to YoungStar, including some reactions that conflict with the policy's intent.

Most would agree that quality problems are not uncommon in Milwaukee County child care. The fact that evidence of widespread low quality did not clearly appear in the survey results could indicate that low-quality providers were less motivated to take a 50-question survey, or that the survey questions did not target elements that best represent overall quality. The results may suggest, however, that while portions of Milwaukee County's child care market need improvement, the most-populated county in the state also contains some of Wisconsin's highest-quality child care providers and most-advanced professional development infrastructure.

Chart 12: Would a quality rating and improvement system encourage you to... (family child care providers)

