

YoungStar in Wisconsin:

An Analysis of Data as of July 2012



YoungStar Progress Report #3



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SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Key Findings

Children in YoungStar:

1. Nearly half of Wisconsin Shares children (46%) are served in programs rated as 3-Star or higher under YoungStar.
2. Trend over time: YoungStar ratings data shows that more and more children are in higher-rated programs as time goes on.

Programs in YoungStar:

3. Trend over time: Ratings data identifies an increasing number of higher-rated programs (3-5 Stars), but the majority of programs (70%) are rated at a 2-Star level.
4. Ratings vary dramatically across program types: licensed group child care centers, licensed family child care, certified family child care, and public schools. A much higher percentage of group child care centers have higher ratings than the other three types.
5. An increasing number of programs have been rated. 4,103 child care programs were rated as of July 2012, compared to 1,516 in July 2011.

YoungStar Regions:

6. The six YoungStar regions vary significantly in the percentage of children in higher quality settings; programs and children participating; and the distribution of children across program types.
7. Milwaukee region has the highest percentage of children in 2-Star programs, while Southern and Northeastern regions have the highest percentage of children in programs rated 3-5 Stars.

Resources to Help Programs Improve:

8. Technical assistance has been provided in 8,788 visits to 2,818 programs since YoungStar began.
9. Professional development counseling has served more than 1,000 individuals since YoungStar began.
10. Nearly 2,000 micro-grants totaling \$1.4 million have been awarded to programs to improve quality.
11. There were 1,273 individuals from 69 counties with T.E.A.C.H. scholarships as of July 2012.

Analysis

1. What does it mean that nearly half of Wisconsin Shares children are in programs with 3- to 5-Star YoungStar ratings?

We believe that the key metric for Wisconsin Shares is the percentage of children in child care settings rated as 3-, 4-, and 5-Star. Breaking out the data by *children involved* instead of by programs participating produces a brighter perspective: Nearly half of *children* (46%) are in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings, compared to 30% of *programs* with 3-5 Star ratings.

2. Why are so many programs rated as 2-Star?

The data shows that a large proportion of programs (70%) are rated as 2-star. That is not surprising given the fact that programs funded by Wisconsin Shares were previously required to just meet basic licensing or certification standards primarily focused on health and safety, not early learning standards. YoungStar, which is designed to help programs meet progressively rigorous early learning quality standards in its 5-Star rating scale, is a big change for providers, many of whom need time to meet the new standards.

3. What are the implications of large numbers of children in 2-Star programs?

Most programs meeting licensing or certification standards provide a safe, healthy environment, and provide nurturing care. For many observers that seems fine. However, research shows that a high-quality early learning program leads to a range of positive outcomes, particularly when children with high needs are served.

4. What are the obstacles to 2-Star programs moving to a 3-Star rating?

Meeting educational credits standards appears to be the greatest obstacle to moving to a 3-Star level. Two-star programs that were rated as of July 2012 had **very** low ratings in the staff qualifications category, which requires specified levels of credit-based education.

5. To what extent is the rise in higher-rated programs due to YoungStar efforts?

A major difficulty in analyzing the data at this time is that the number of rated programs continues to rise (i.e., at different points in time the sample size has changed). We will get a clearer picture of the quality of programs in YoungStar as the number of rated programs stabilizes. However, the significant resources and effort to help programs improve through education, training, technical assistance, and micro-grants support the proposition that a significant number of programs are improving their quality.

6. How is YoungStar working for family child care?

Family child care programs have dramatically lower quality ratings than group child care programs. It may be difficult for family child care programs to meet quality standards above the 2-Star level. Further study of family child care and YoungStar is warranted.

Background

This report is the third in a series of WCCF reports tracking the progress of Wisconsin's YoungStar program, a child care quality rating and improvement system launched in 2011. YoungStar focuses on children of low-income working families receiving assistance from the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program. YoungStar rates the quality of child care programs on a 5-star scale and is administered in six regions of the state. The analysis in this report is based on data as of the beginning of July 2012.

Programs are rated as 1 Star if they do not meet health and safety standards and are prohibited from receiving funding from Wisconsin Shares. Two-star programs meet regulatory standards for health, safety, program and personnel (prior to 2011, these were the only standards required to participate in Wisconsin Shares). Star levels 3, 4, and 5 represent progressively improved quality, with an emphasis on early learning and development.

For more background on YoungStar, the 5-Star quality indicators, and a summary of the program's implementation history, see the Appendix at the end of this report.

I. CHILDREN: QUALITY RATINGS OF THEIR CHILD CARE SETTINGS

Nearly half (46%) of Wisconsin Shares children are served in programs rated 3-Star or higher

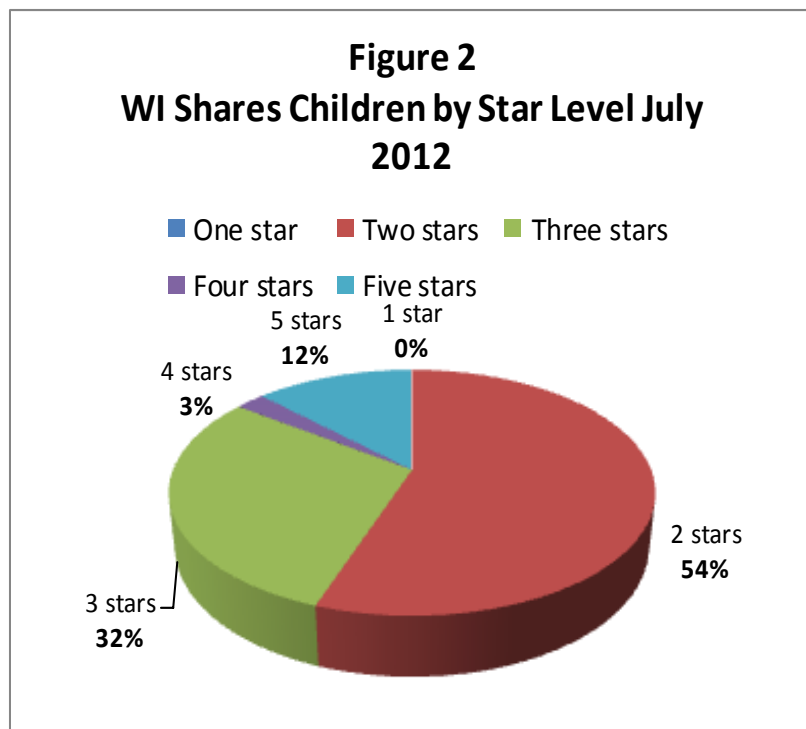
Early reporting on YoungStar focused on percent of child care programs at different star levels. But if the primary desired outcome for YoungStar is a positive impact on children, it makes more sense to focus on the percentage of **children** receiving early care and education services in high-quality programs. More recent analysis of YoungStar that measures *where the children are* rather than *how many programs receive which ratings* reveals a considerably brighter picture than does simply counting programs at the various rating levels. As of July 2012, nearly half the children (46%) funded by Wisconsin Shares are in programs rated higher than 2 Stars, with 54% in 2-Star programs.

So while 70% of **programs** have 2-Star ratings, only 54% of **children** are served in 2-Star rated programs funded by Wisconsin Shares. And while about 30% of **programs** are rated higher than 2 Stars, 46% of **children** attend programs rated at 3 Stars and above. (See Figures 1 and 2)

Figure 1 Comparison: Providers and Children by Star Rating Funded by Wisconsin Shares July 2012						
	1 Star	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Total
Programs by Star Rating	0	2186	679	86	179	3130
Percent of Total Programs	0%	70%	22%	3%	6%	101%
Children Served by Star Level	0	23,038	13,523	1,251	5,076	42,888
Percent of Children Served by Star Level	0%	54%	32%	3%	12%	101%

Note: Programs and children in this table have funding support from Wisconsin Shares, and the data do not include 973 rated programs that do not receive Wisconsin Shares funding and the children they serve. Wisconsin Shares does not reimburse providers at the 1-star level for child care services. Some totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Because center-based programs serve more children than family child care settings, and because center-based programs are generally rated higher, the percentage of *children* served in higher-quality programs is significantly higher than the percentage of *programs* rated as higher quality.



Infants and Toddlers: 45% in 3- to 5-Star programs

Because the first two years are so crucial to a child's healthy development, an analysis of Wisconsin Shares children under 2 years old is appropriate. Nearly 7,000 infants and toddlers were funded through Wisconsin Shares. Of those, 45% were in child care programs rated 3- to 5-Stars, and 55 percent were in 2-Star settings, very similar to the distribution of all children, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3		
Infants and Toddlers (under 2 years old) by YoungStar Rating		
<i>(The children in this table are funded by Wisconsin Shares)</i>		
July 2012		
Rating	Number children under 2	Percent children under 2
One Star	0	0%
Two Stars	3,843	55%
Three Stars	2,059	30%
Four Stars	163	2%
Five Stars	872	13%
TOTAL	6,937	100%

Trend over time: Ratings data identifies more children in higher-rated programs.

The number of Wisconsin Shares children in higher-rated programs (3- to 5-Stars) has increased over the last year. From July 2011 to July 2012, the number of children funded by Wisconsin Shares in programs rated 3- to 5-Stars more than quadrupled, from 4,526 to 19,850.

Significant change occurred in the first six months of 2012, when a large proportion of programs had been rated. In those six months, the percentage of children in higher-rated programs increased from 34 percent to 46 percent. At the same time, the percentage of children in 2-Star centers decreased from 66 percent to 54 percent (see Figure 4).

It is difficult to determine to what extent the rise in higher-rated programs is the result of YoungStar incentives and help, and to what extent it is attributable to more programs

that were already at higher quality levels are now being rated and becoming part of the calculation. In other words, to what extent are we simply identifying higher quality programs that were already out there and to what extent is YoungStar serving as a major catalyst for child care programs to improve their quality?

Figure 4
Number and Percent of Wisconsin Shares-funded Children by Star Ratings Over Time (July 2011- July 2012)
 (Lower quality= 1-2-star rating; Higher quality= 3- to 5-star rating)

Date	Number of children in 1-2 Star rated programs	Percent of children in 1-2 Star rated programs	Number of children in 3- to 5-Star rated programs	Percent of children in 3- to 5-Star rated programs
July 2011	5,867	56%	4,526	44%
Jan. 2012	24,250	66%	12,520	34%
July 2012	23,038	54%	19,850	46%

It's difficult to interpret the data over time pertaining to the balance between the number of children enrolled in higher- and lower-rated programs. Between July 2011 and January 2012, most of the growth was in number of children enrolled in 1- and 2-Star programs. During the subsequent half-year from January 2012 to July 2012, most of the growth was in 3- to 5-Star ratings. We will know much more about the balance in the next several months as more programs are evaluated and the total number of rated programs begins to stabilize.

Trend over time: Ratings data identify more children in higher-rated programs.

The initial estimate of the distribution of Wisconsin Shares children across the various star levels was more optimistic than the actual distribution of children in July 2012. A Legislative Fiscal Bureau paper in June 2010 provided an estimate of the percentage of WI Shares children at each star level from 2010 through 2015, based on a plan proposed by DCF. Figure 5 demonstrates how those estimates compare to the actual ratings as of July 2012.

Most programs now have ratings, and the percentage of children in 2-Star rated programs is higher than anticipated, and the percentage of children in 3- to 5-Star programs is lower than expected.

Figure 5 A Comparison of Initial Estimates and Actual Distribution of Children by YoungStar Quality Rating		
Star Rating	Initial Estimate Children by YoungStar Rating SFY 2011-12 *	Actual Data Children by YoungStar Rating July 2012
One Star	0%	0%
Two Stars	41%	53%
Three Stars	32%	32%
Four Stars	9%	3%
Five Stars	15%	12%

*Source: DCF and Legislative Fiscal Bureau, June 2010.

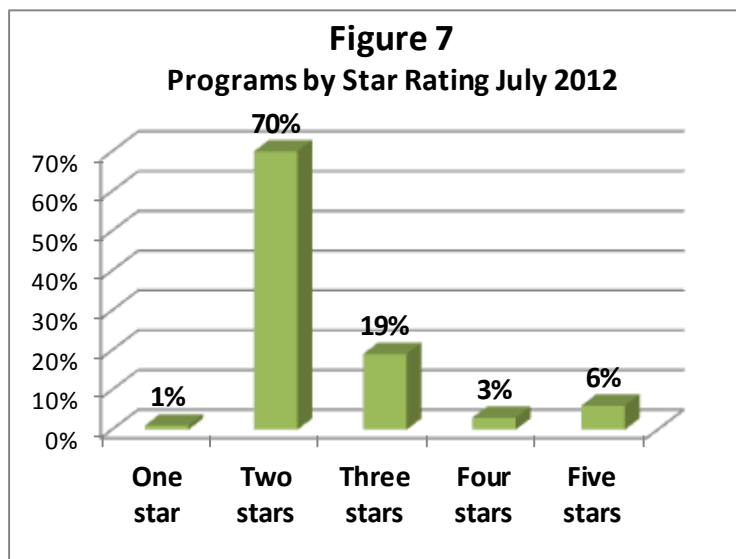
This should lead to significant savings in fiscal year 2012-13, since the 5% reductions in Wisconsin Shares payments for 2-Star programs will affect more programs than anticipated, and higher payments to 4- and 5-Star programs will go to fewer programs than estimated in the biennial budget.

II. PROGRAMS: QUALITY RATINGS AND YOUNGSTAR PARTICIPATION

Trend over time: Ratings data identifies an increased number of higher-rated programs, but 70% are at 2-Star level.

While the number and percentage of children in quality settings under YoungStar may be the most important metric, tracking the number and percentage of quality child care *programs* is also enlightening, giving a picture of the supply available for children and families. A comparison of rated programs over the 12-month period from July 2011 to July 2012 shows a trend toward higher ratings. The number of child care programs at higher levels (3-Star, 4-Star, and 5-Star) grew by 400 percent in a single year, with 1,172 programs rated at higher levels in July 2012, compared to 229 in July 2011 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Number of programs rated 3- to 5-stars over time		
July 2011	January 2012	July 2012
229	663	1172



While most programs were still at the 2-Star level, the percentage is declining: in July 2011, over 84% of programs rated were at the 2-Star level; a year later, in July 2012, 70% were at the 2-Star level. See Figure 7 for percentage breakout by star levels.

Most of the change occurred in the last six months of the period analyzed. As Figure 8 indicates, in the six-month period from January to July 2012, the general trend has been an increase in both the number **and** the percentage of programs with higher ratings. As more programs were rated and more programs took advantage of training offerings,

technical assistance, and micro-grants over the last six months, there were significant increases in programs rated at the 3- to 5-Star levels.

In the six-month period, the number of **programs** rated 3- to 5-Star levels increased by 509, a significant increase over a six-month period, raising the percentage of higher-rated programs from 20% to 28%. Meanwhile, the percentage of programs at the 2-Star level dropped from 79% to 70%. At the same time the *number* of 2-Star programs also grew moderately.

Figure 8						
Programs by Star Ratings Over Time						
	July 2011		January 2012		July 2012	
Provider Ratings	Number: programs by star rating	Percent of Total	Number: programs by star rating	Percent of Total	Number: programs by star rating	Percent of Total
One Star	10	1%	45	1%	40	1%
Two Stars	1277	84%	2630	79%	2891	70%
Three Stars	0	0%	413	12%	792	19%
Four Stars	47	3%	46	1%	120	3%
Five Stars	182	12%	204	6%	260	6%
TOTAL	1,516	100%	3,338	99%	4,103	99%

Note: This table includes all programs rated by YoungStar, whether or not funded by Wisconsin Shares. Some sums do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Moving Programs from 2-Star to 3-Star rating

With so many child care programs rated as 2 Stars under the YoungStar 5-Star system, an analysis of 2- and 3-Star programs provides helpful data:

- Most 2-Star programs got automated ratings. Of the 2,891 2-Star programs statewide, 64% requested an automated rating, which meant they did **not** request a rating assessment and would automatically be rated as a 2-Star program. But 1067 programs did get rated as 2-Star quality through the assessment process.

- Two-star programs must earn 11 out of 40 possible points to advance to a 3-Star rating. On average, 2-Star programs are earning 6.7 points. Figure 9 provides an analysis of the four categories in which they can earn points:

Figure 9			
Average points earned by category by 2-star programs			
Category for earning points	Possible points: group child care center	Possible points: family child care	Average points earned by 2-Star programs
Staff qualifications	15	14	0.6
Learning environment /curriculum	13	14	2.2
Professional practices	7	7	2.7
Health and wellness	7	7	1.2
TOTAL	40	40	6.7

The data shows that 2-Star programs are earning the least number of points in the staff qualifications category, where 2-Star programs earned less than one point on average. To earn the minimal points needed to move to the 3-Star level, teachers, administrators, and family child care providers must earn specified college-level credits. The time and investment required may be a serious barrier for many 2-Star programs, particularly family child care programs.

Two-Star programs may be able to increase the quality of their learning environment and curriculum at a reasonable cost and effort and meet 3-Star requirements in those categories and attain the required 11 points. However, in order to move up a star level under YoungStar, a program must meet minimum requirements in *each* of the four categories: So if meeting the minimum requirements in the staff qualifications category is a major obstacle, gaining points in other categories will not allow them to move to a 3-Star status.

Ratings broken out by four program types

This section looks at quality ratings for four different program types that comprise the 4,103 programs participating in YoungStar as of July 2012:

1. licensed group child care centers (serving 9 or more children): **1485 programs**
 2. licensed family child care programs (serving 4-8 children): **1466 programs**
 3. certified family child care programs(serving less than 7): **1089 programs**
 4. public school child care programs (mostly after-school): **63 programs**
- 4,103 TOTAL**

1. Licensed group child care centers: 55% rated at 3- to 5-Stars

Over half (55%) of group child care centers participating in YoungStar were rated at 3- to 5-Stars, a major increase from six months earlier when 42% were rated above 2 Stars. Sixteen percent of group centers are rated as 5 stars. Forty-five percent are rated at the 2-Star level. Child care centers serving 9 or more children are licensed for the health, safety, and welfare of children, and must meet a rigorous set of rules and requirements. Most programs serve 50 children or more, and many serve well over 100. Many group child care programs have participated in private accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the city of Madison, and other auspices over the last 15 years that has helped them verify high-quality standards that help them receive higher ratings in YoungStar.

2. Licensed family child care programs: 78% rated at 1- to 2-Star level Seventy-eight percent of licensed family child care programs are rated at a 2-Star level or lower, with 22% at 3- to 5-Star levels. Licensed family child care programs serve four to eight children and meet rigorous standards similar to group child care centers, but adapted for a smaller setting. Accreditation efforts have been more recent for family child care, and may offer an avenue for programs to move up the YoungStar 5-Star scale.

3. Certified family child care programs: 97% rated at 1- to 2-Star level

Nearly all certified family child care programs are rated at a 2-Star level. These small family child care homes are not required to be licensed but must meet regulatory standards considerably less stringent than licensing rules. A certified provider can serve less than four children under 7 years old unrelated to them (the threshold for family child care licensing), but can serve as many as six children total if some are related or older than 6 years. Certification allows smaller family providers to receive Wisconsin Shares funding.

4. Public school child care: 86% rated at 2-Star level

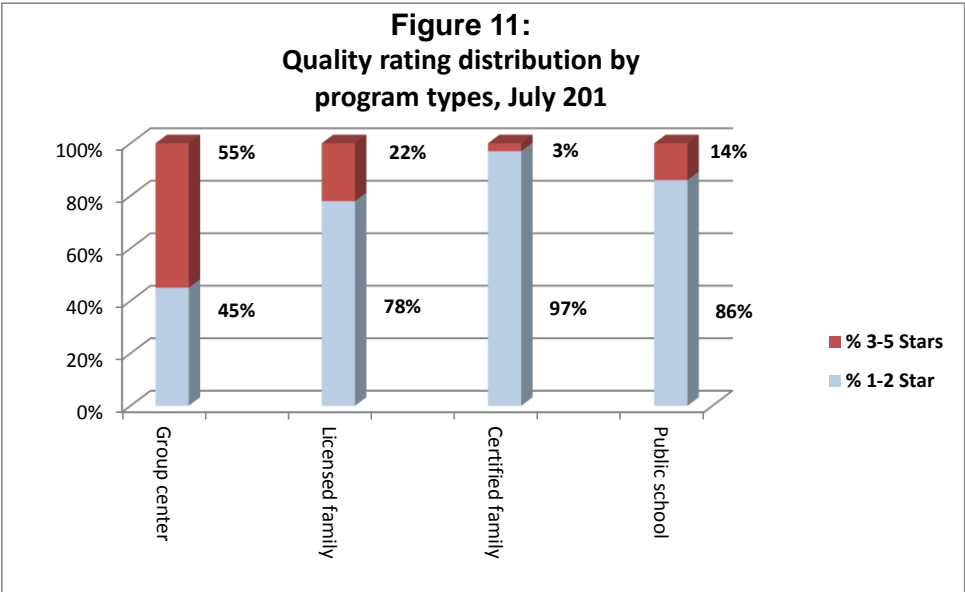
Some public schools provide child care services. Very few public schools – only 63 – are participating in YoungStar currently, but that number is likely to rise as YoungStar includes school-age child care in the system. As of July 2012, YoungStar is beginning to rate school-age child care using quality standards designed for school-age services. Most school-age child care services are in licensed child care settings, but some are provided by public schools on-site.

Figure10 provides details of each program type by star level.

Figure 10
Child Care Programs Rated Broken Out by Provider Type, July 2012

Provider Type	1 Star	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Total
Licensed group child care	12	663	511	60	239	1,485
Licensed family child care	19	1127	245	54	21	1,466
Certified family child care	9	1047	27	6	0	1,089
Public School child care	0	54	9	0	0	63
TOTAL	40	2891	792	120	260	4,103

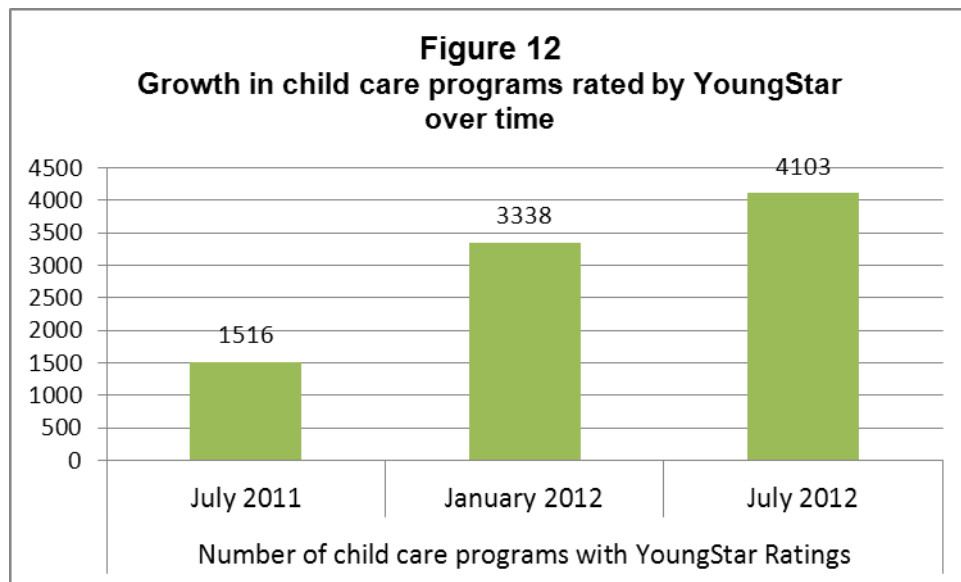
Figure 11 provides a comparison of star rating distribution by four program types, broken out by percentage of programs rated as 1 to 2 Stars, and percentage of programs rated 3 to 5 Stars. Quality ratings under YoungStar are dramatically higher for group child care centers than for all three other types, with well over half (55%) rated 3 to 5 Stars.



Increasing number of programs rated: 4,103 child care programs were rated as of July 2012.

As of July 2012, a total of **4,103** programs had been rated on a scale of 1 to 5 Stars, based either on an assessment of quality or on a provider's decision not to be rated above a 2-Star level. Given the challenge of rating thousands of programs in a relatively short period, this is a significant accomplishment for DCF and the Consortium responsible for much of the implementation. The number of programs rated increased by 2,587 in a single year, from 1,516 programs in July 2011 to 4,103 in July 2012.

Figure 12 illustrates the growth in child care programs rated over time.



Note: These statistics apply to all programs rated by YoungStar, including both those receiving Wisconsin Shares funding and therefore required to participate, and other child care programs that are not required to participate but do so voluntarily.

The number of programs rated by YoungStar is likely to grow even more in the next few months, since 765 ratings were pending as of July 2012.

III. ANALYSIS BY YOUNGSTAR REGIONS

The YoungStar program is divided into six regions (see Appendix B for regional map). This section provides analysis of trends in each region, including breakout of children by star levels, numbers of children and programs participating in YoungStar, distribution of child care programs by type of program, and services for infants and toddlers.



Distribution of children by star rating across regions

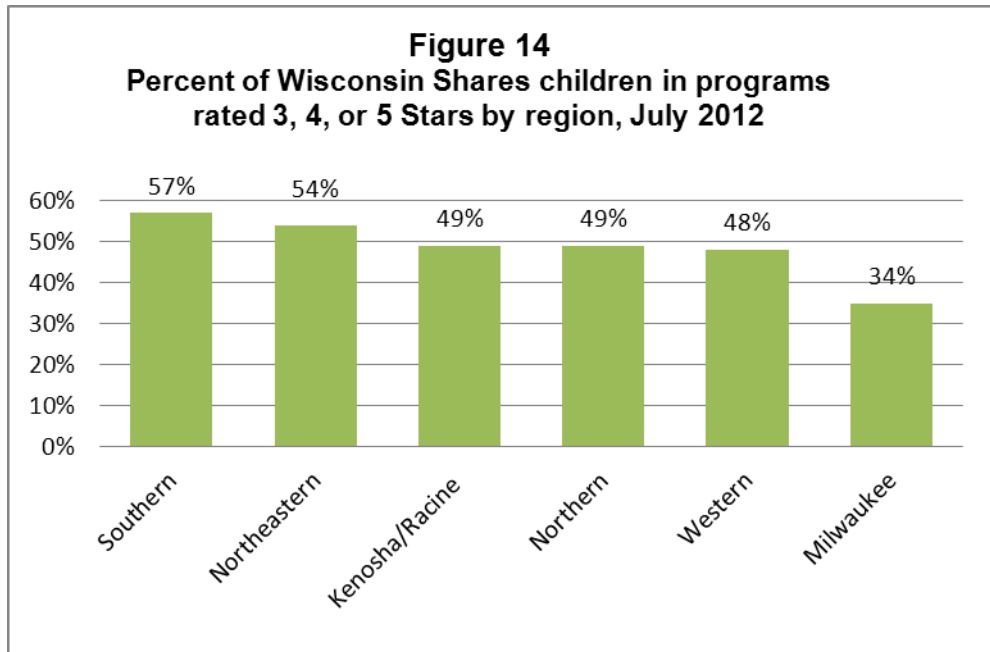
Figure 13 shows the distribution of children funded by Wisconsin Shares by region and by star rating.

Figure 13
Breakout of Children by Star Level of Program by Region
(Children are funded by Wisconsin Shares)

Region	Two Stars	Three Stars	Four Stars	Five Stars	Total Children
Kenosha/Racine	1,885	1,505	96	204	3,690
Milwaukee	12,173	4,381	175	1,851	18,580
Northeastern	2,215	2,611	281	1,053	6,160
Northern	1,535	1,116	147	203	3,001
Southern	3,353	2,622	462	1,426	7,863
Western	1,877	1,288	90	337	3,592
Total	23,038	13,523	1,251	5,074	42,886

Note: Programs rated as 1 Star are not eligible to receive Wisconsin Shares funding.

Percent of children in higher quality programs across regions



It's difficult to know what accounts for the variation by region. The level of child care quality in each region reflects the development of the child care supply over many years, likely influenced by such factors as the qualifications of the child care workforce, the impact of welfare reform, the level of poverty, and the ability of communities to build higher quality programs.



Data by YoungStar Regions as of July 2012

Note: A map of the regions can be found in Appendix B.

1. Milwaukee Region: 18,580 children in YoungStar

Highest percentage of children in lower quality settings: While Milwaukee has more children in 5-Star settings than any other region, it also has by far the highest proportion (66%) of children in 2-Star programs, reflecting a major challenge for improving quality. Milwaukee also has the highest number of children in lower-quality settings, with over 23,000 children in 2-Star settings. Figure 15 below shows the percent of children at each quality level in Milwaukee.

Figure 15 Percentage of children by star level Milwaukee region			
2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star
66%	24%	1%	10%

Highest number of children and programs: Of the six regions, Milwaukee region serves by far the most children in YoungStar, and those children are served by the highest number of programs participating in YoungStar, with 18,580 children served by 1,078 programs.

Types of child care programs: Most children (74%) are served in group child care centers in Milwaukee region. Here is the breakout of where children involved in YoungStar are served:

Figure 16 Distribution of children by program type Milwaukee region	
Type of program	Percent of children served
Group child care center	74%
Licensed family child care	19%
Certified family child care	7%
Public School or school-age program	2%

Infants and toddlers: Milwaukee region programs under YoungStar serve 2,516 children under age 2, with 75% of them in group child care centers. Sixty percent of infants and toddlers are in 2-Star settings in Milwaukee, and 34% in 3- to 5-Star settings. Among regions, Milwaukee region has the lowest percentage of infants and toddlers in higher-rated, 3- to 5-Star settings

2. Southern Region: 7,865 children in YoungStar

Second highest percentage of children in higher quality settings: The Southern region has the second highest percentage (57%) of children served in 3-, 4- or 5-Star programs among regions. It has the highest percent (18%) of children in 5-Star settings.

Figure 17 Percentage of children by star level Southern region			
2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star
43%	33%	6%	18%

The City of Madison's long-standing child care accreditation program, unique in the state, undoubtedly contributed to the supply of high-quality programs.

Second highest number of children and programs: Southern region serves the second highest number of children and programs, with 7,865 children in 1,044 programs participating in YoungStar.

Types of child care programs: Most children (81%) are served in group child care centers under YoungStar in Southern region.

Figure 18 Distribution of children by program type Southern region	
Type of program	Percent of children served
Group child care center	81%
Licensed family child care	11%
Certified family child care	7%
Public School or school-age program	2%

Infants and toddlers served: Southern region programs under YoungStar serve 1,177 children under age 2, with 82% of them in group child care centers. Forty-five percent of infants and toddlers are in 2-Star settings and 55% in 3- to 5-Star settings.

3. Northeastern Region: 6,160 children in YoungStar

Highest percentage of children in higher quality settings: Northeastern region has the highest percentage of children in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings (64 percent), with only 36% of children in 2-Star programs. Among regions, Northeastern region has the second highest percentage of the children in 5-Star programs (17%), and the highest percentage of children in 3-Star programs.

Figure 19 Percentage of children by star level Northeastern region			
2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star
36%	42%	5%	17%

Number of children and programs in YoungStar: Northeastern region includes 6,160 children in 642 child care programs participating in YoungStar.

Types of child care programs: Most children (90%) are served in group child care centers under YoungStar in Northeastern region, the highest percentage among regions.

Figure 20 Distribution of children by program type Northeastern region	
Type of program	Percent of children served
Group child care center	90%
Licensed family child care	6%
Certified family child care	2%
Public School or school-age program	1%

The high percentage in group child care centers likely contributes to the high percentage of children in higher quality settings, since group child care centers generally rate higher in quality than other settings.

Infants and toddlers served: Northeastern region programs under YoungStar serve 945 children under age 2, with 91% of them in group child care centers. Sixty-three percent of infants and toddlers are in 3- to 5-Star settings, the highest among regions, with 37% of infants and toddlers in 2-Star settings.

4. Kenosha/Racine Region: 3,690 children in YoungStar

About half of children in higher quality settings: Kenosha/Racine region has a little over half (51%) of children in 2-Star programs, and slightly less than half (49%) of children in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings.

Figure 21 Percentage of children by star level Kenosha/Racine region			
2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star
51%	41%	3%	6%

Number of children and programs in YoungStar: Kenosha/Racine region includes 3,690 children in 243 child care programs participating in YoungStar.

Types of child care programs: Most children (85%) are served in group child care centers under YoungStar in the Kenosha/Racine region, second only to Northeastern region.

Figure 22 Distribution of children by program type Kenosha/Racine region	
Type of program	Percent of children served
Group child care center	85%
Licensed family child care	5%
Certified family child care	11%
Public School or school-age program	0%

The region has the second highest percent of children in certified family child care (11 percent) among regions.

Infants and toddlers served: Kenosha/Racine region programs under YoungStar serve 945 children under age 2, with 85 percent of them in group child care centers. Forty-eight percent of infants and toddlers are in 2-Star settings, and 52 percent in 3- to 5-Star settings.

5. Western Region: 3,592 children in YoungStar

About half of children in higher quality settings: Western region has a little over half (52 percent) of children in 2-Star programs, and a slightly less than half (48 percent) of children in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings.

Figure 23 Percentage of children by star level Western region			
2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star
52%	36%	3%	9%

Number of children and programs in YoungStar: Western region includes 3,592 children in 626 child care programs participating in YoungStar.

Types of child care programs: Most children (74%) are served in group child care centers under YoungStar in the Western region

Figure 24 Distribution of children by program type Western region	
Type of program	Percent of children served
Group child care center	74%
Licensed family child care	15%
Certified family child care	8%
Public School or school-age program	4%

Infants and toddlers served: Western region programs under YoungStar serve 534 children under age 2, with 74% of them in group child care centers. Fifty-four percent of infants and toddlers are in 2-Star settings, and 46% in 3- to 5-Star settings.

6. Northern Region: 3,001 children in YoungStar

About half of children in higher quality settings: Northern region has a little over half (51%) of children 2- Star programs, and a slightly less than half (49%) of children in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings.

Figure 25 Percentage of children by star level Northern region			
2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star
51%	37%	5%	7%

Number of children and programs in YoungStar: Northern region includes 3,001 children in 540 child care programs participating in YoungStar.

Types of child care programs: Most children (58%) are served in group child care centers under YoungStar in the Northern region, the lowest among regions. The region has the highest percentage of children in licensed family child care (20%) and certified family child care (21%). The greater use of family child care settings in Northern region is likely due to the large number of rural counties.

Figure 26 Distribution of children by program type Northern region	
Type of program	Percent of children served
Group child care center	58%
Licensed family child care	20%
Certified family child care	21%
Public School or school-age program	0%

Infants and toddlers served: Northern region programs under YoungStar serve 422 children under age 2, with 59% of them in group child care centers. Fifty percent of infants and toddlers are in 2-Star settings, and 50% in 3- to 5-Star settings.



IV. YOUNGSTAR RESOURCES TO HELP PROGRAMS IMPROVE

Technical assistance has been provided in 8,788 visits to 2,818 programs as of July 2012.

Cumulative onsite technical assistance since the beginning of YoungStar is impressive, with nearly 9,000 visits to over 2,800 programs. In the six-month period from January through June 2012, child care providers received 2,453 visits. Technical assistance visits occur when a YoungStar staff member goes into a program and provides one-on-one coaching, mentoring, or guidance.

Figure 27 shows the number of cumulative technical assistance visits and the number of child care programs reached by region.

Figure 27		
Technical Assistance Visits to Child Care Programs		
Cumulative as of July 2012		
Region	Visits	Child care programs
Western	1041	345
Northern	846	255
Northeastern	1324	456
Southern	2195	693
Milwaukee	2938	909
Racine/Kenosha	444	160
Total	8788	2818

Professional development counseling has served more than 1,000 individuals.

Professional development counseling is available to YoungStar participants to help them plan out their training and coursework to improve educational qualifications. YoungStar has provided counseling to 1,052 individuals since YoungStar began.

Nearly 2,000 micro-grants totaling \$1.4 million have been awarded.

Since July 2011, the YoungStar consortium has awarded 1,997 micro-grants to help group child care centers, family child care programs, and school-age programs improve

their quality. A total of over \$1.4 million in micro-grants have been distributed. Micro-grants are used by child care programs to purchase materials and resources and pursue professional development opportunities tied to achieving quality improvement goals. Wisconsin Early Childhood Association administers the micro-grants. The amounts vary depending on the size of the program.

Figure 28 shows the cumulative micro-grants awarded, broken out by regions, from the beginning of YoungStar in 2011 through June 2012.

Figure 28					
Cumulative Micro-grants Awarded					
Cumulative as of July 2012					
Region	Certified family child care	Licensed family child center	Licensed group child care center	School-age programs	Total
Western	39	92	128	4	263
Northern	29	61	97	0	187
Northeastern	25	78	240	1	344
Southern	64	161	293	13	531
Milwaukee	98	249	205	3	555
Kenosha/Racine	20	27	70	0	117
Total Quantity	275	668	1033	21	1997
Total Amount	\$68,750	\$334,000	\$1,033,000	\$21,000	\$1,456,750

1,273 individuals from 69 counties had T.E.A.C.H. scholarships as of mid-2012.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarship program, administered by Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, provides scholarships to child care professionals to help them improve their educational credentials through credit-based courses. While not all scholarships go to programs participating in YoungStar, the start of YoungStar has undoubtedly spurred increased interest in T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.

In the current fiscal year, T.E.A.C.H. awarded approximately 100 new scholarships each month, translating to roughly 600 scholarship awards in the first half of 2012. As of June 2012, there were a total of 1,273 active scholarship recipients from 69 Wisconsin counties. Twenty percent of the active recipients were family childcare providers, 56%

were teachers or assistant teachers in a group child care center, and the remaining 24% were directors or administrators in a group center.

Over the past five years, there has been a steady demand for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, with the biggest jump occurring between State Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011.

As of July 2012, there was no waitlist for T.E.A.C.H. However, the T.E.A.C.H. program estimates that it will exhaust current biennial funding allotted for scholarships by March 2013, leaving several months when no scholarships will be awarded.



V. ANALYSIS

The review of data on the progress of YoungStar raises some key issues for the future.

1. What does it mean that nearly half of Wisconsin Shares children are in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings?

We believe that the key metric for Wisconsin Shares is the percentage of children in child care settings rated as 3-, 4-, and 5-Star. Earlier data looked primarily at programs. Initially 80% of them were at a 2-Star level or lower. Now 70% of programs are rated as 2-Star. However, breaking out the data by *children* involved gives a brighter perspective: Nearly half of children are in programs with 3- to 5-Star ratings. Focusing on where the children are, the challenge doesn't seem as steep.

2. Why are so many children in 2-Star settings?

A look at the data shows a large proportion of children in programs rated as 2-Star. That is not surprising given the fact that Wisconsin Shares was designed primarily to make child care affordable to low-income parents as welfare reform added strong work requirements to assistance programs. The requirements child care programs had to meet were regulatory requirements, primarily licensing baseline standards for health, safety, program, and personnel. Two-star programs meet those basic standards. The key questions are how many of them will move to a higher rating, and how fast.

3. What are the implications of large numbers of children in 2-Star rated programs?

Most programs meeting licensing or certification standards provide a safe, healthy environment, and provide nurturing care. For many observers that seems fine. However, recent research shows that high-quality early learning programs lead to a range of positive outcomes, particularly when children with high needs are served. Since Wisconsin Shares children are from families in poverty or near poverty, they are precisely the demographic that might benefit the most from a high-quality early learning experience. YoungStar is an effort to transform a program from focusing on child care supply to child care quality (see Public Policy Forum's *Moving the Goal Posts: the shift from child care supply to child care policy*).

(<http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/pdfs/MovingTheGoalPosts.pdf>).

4. What are the obstacles to 2-Star programs moving to a 3-Star rating?

Meeting educational credits standards appears to be the greatest obstacle to moving to the 3-Star level. Two-star programs that were rated as of July 2012 had very low ratings in the staff qualifications category, which requires specified credit-based education. It is likely to take considerable time for teachers and providers to enroll in and complete

credit-based courses while continuing to work in child care, often with low wages. Cost may also be a significant obstacle. If scholarships (like T.E.A.C.H. scholarships) are not available to cover most of the costs for individuals striving to increase their educational qualifications, many in the child care workforce may be unable or unwilling to earn additional credits.

5. Is the growth in programs rated 3- to 5-Star due to YoungStar efforts or to more programs being rated?

A major difficulty of analyzing the data over time is that the numbers of rated programs continue to rise at a high rate, meaning the sample size is changing quickly. Do more programs meet higher standards simply because more programs are in the sample, or are many programs moving up the 5-Star scale through quality improvement efforts? It is difficult to tell from the data available to us, but both are probably at work. We should be getting a clearer picture of the quality of programs in YoungStar as the number of programs rated stabilizes. The significant resources and efforts to help programs improve through education, training and technical assistance, and micro-grants awarded support the proposition that a significant group of programs are improving their quality.

6. How is YoungStar working for family child care?

Family child care programs have dramatically lower quality ratings than group child care programs. Seventy-eight percent of **licensed** family child care programs are rated at 2 Stars or lower, and 97% of **certified** are rated at 2 Stars or lower. Research has generally shown lower quality in family child care programs overall, but the low staff-child ratios and the family atmosphere in family child care can contribute to an ideal setting for early learning and development. It may be difficult for most family child care programs to progress above the 2-Star level, as some YoungStar standards seem out of reach to them. It is also likely that completing credit courses will take time for providers who are already working long hours. Further study of family child care and YoungStar is warranted.

Summary

YoungStar has the potential to be a major force in transforming a large proportion of Wisconsin's early childhood programs into high-quality early learning agencies, but such a transformation is not likely to happen quickly. Wisconsin needs to build upon the strong YoungStar start and ensure that the incentives and supports are sufficient to fulfill the program's potential.

VI: APPENDICES

Appendix A: Background

A1. Summary of YoungStar

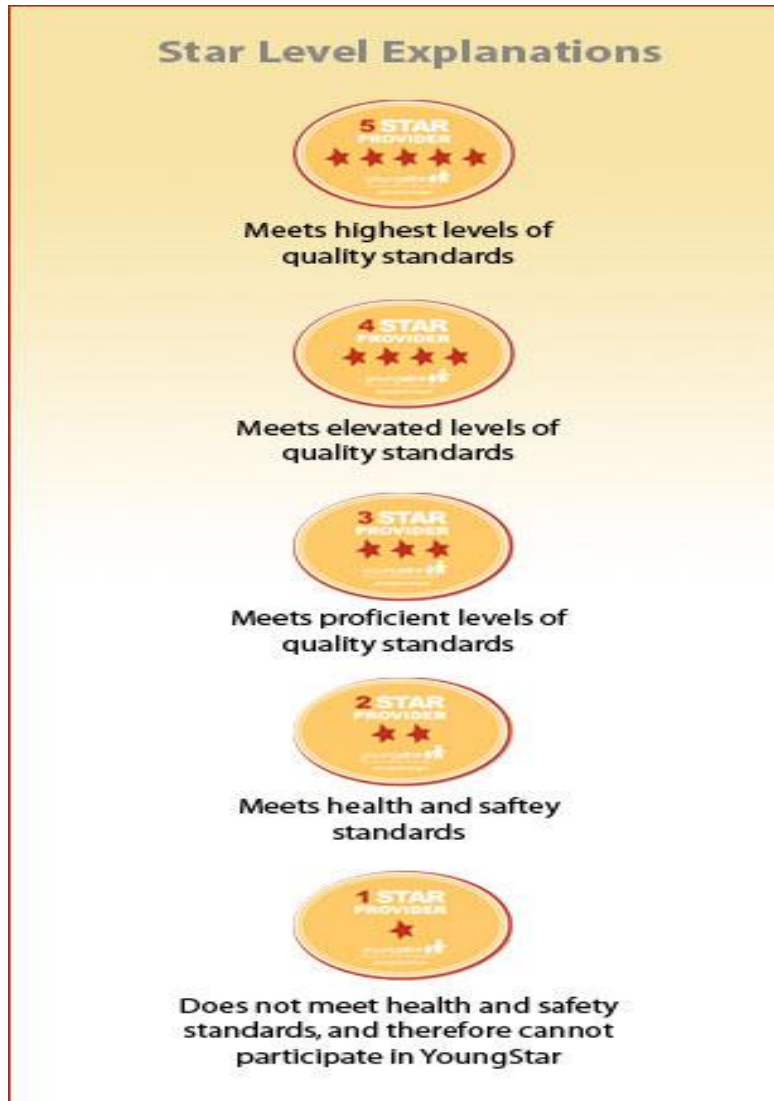
YoungStar is a program of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to improve the quality of child care for Wisconsin children. YoungStar is designed to:

- evaluate and rate the quality of care given by child care providers;
- help parents choose the best child care for their kids;
- support providers with tools and training to deliver high-quality early care; and
- set a consistent standard for child care quality.

(Source: YoungStar website, Department of Children and Families, <http://dcf.wi.gov/youngstar>)



A2. Five-star ratings



YoungStar evaluates the quality of care given by regulated child care providers and rates them from 1 to 5 Stars, with 5 Stars being the highest rating, similar to ratings for hotels, restaurants, or other types of businesses.

A provider's star rating is based on these criteria:

- Education Qualifications and Training
- Learning Environment and Curriculum
- Professional and Business Practices
- Child Health and Well-Being Practices

(Source: YoungStar website, Department of Children and Families, <http://dcf.wi.gov/youngstar>)

A3. Implementation Background

In November 2010, DCF contracted with a consortium of organizations to deliver specified YoungStar services in six regions in the state. The Consortium is made up of three agencies: Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, Supporting Families Together Association, and Celebrate Children Foundation.

The Consortium is responsible for:

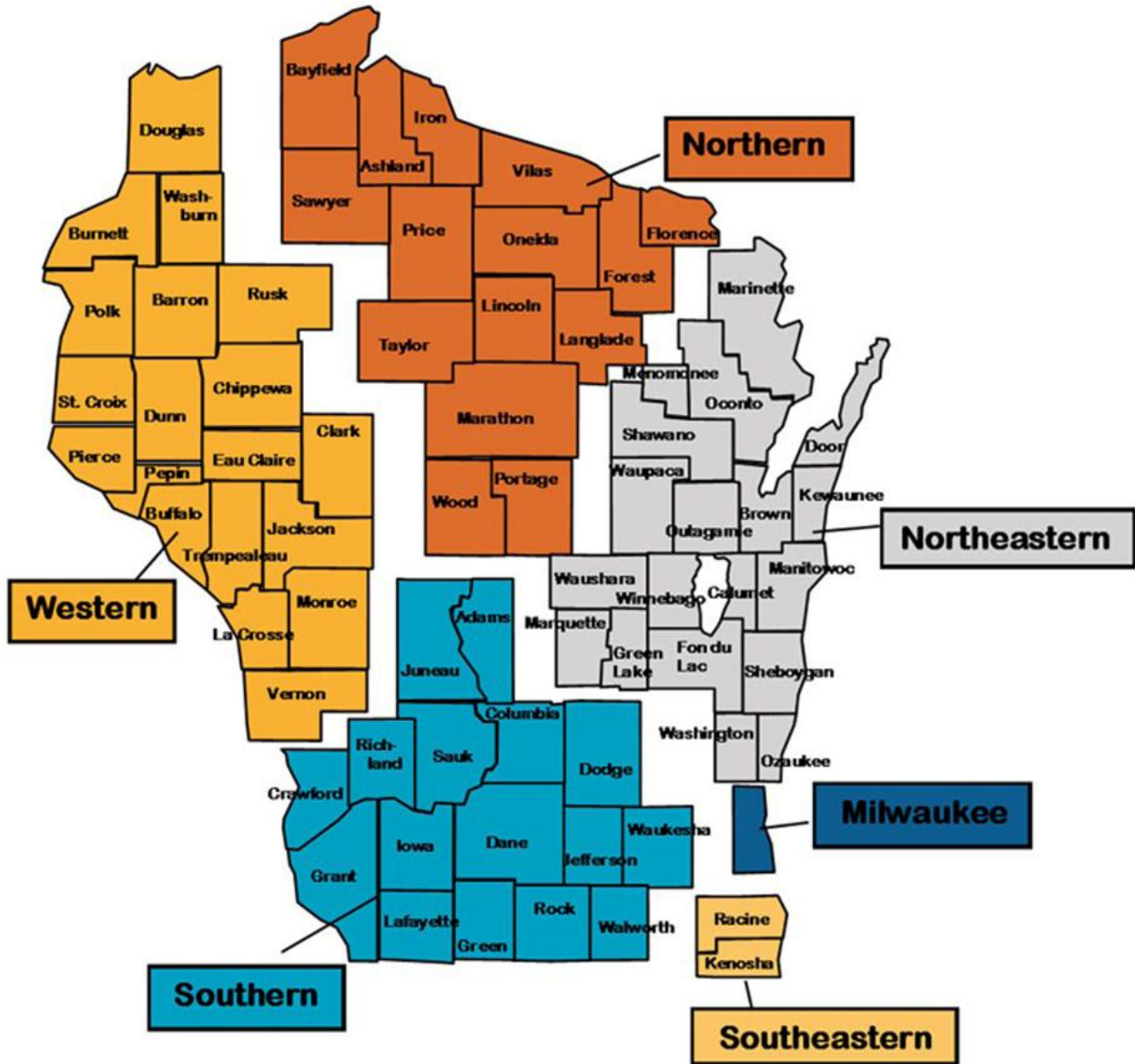
- YoungStar administration for six regional areas of the state;
- technical assistance to early care and education providers;
- providing ratings via observation and assessment;
- administering micro-grants to help programs improve; and
- public outreach and communication to provide parents with concrete and understandable information on how to choose child care programs.

The table below shows the tiered reimbursement schedule adopted by the State Legislature in the 2011-13 budget:

Tiered Reimbursement Schedule	
Program Rating	Impact on Wisconsin Shares Payments
One Star	Prohibited from receiving Wisconsin Shares payments
Two Stars	Minus 5 percent, effective July 2012
Three Stars	No change
Four Stars	Plus 5 percent, effective July 2012
Five Stars	Plus 10 percent, effective July 2012; increasing to 25 percent, effective January 2013

A major emphasis the first half of 2012 was to get child care programs rated on the 5-star scale and to provide support to programs to improve their quality.

Appendix B: YoungStar Regions



Appendix C:

More information about YoungStar and Early Childhood Issues

- ✓ Wisconsin Council on Children and Families three progress reports on YoungStar and other early education publications:
http://www.wccf.org/education_pub.php
- ✓ YoungStar information on the Department of Children and Families website:
<http://dcf.wi.gov/youngstar/>
- ✓ Public Policy Forum reports:
<http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/pdfs/YoungStarYearOne.pdf>
<http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/pdfs/QRISBrief.pdf>
<http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/pdfs/MovingTheGoalPosts.pdf>

