



Key Themes of Feedback on Child Care Center Draft Revised Licensing Standards

Child Care Regulation Modernization – Revised Licensing Standards

November 2024



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Contents

Key Themes of Feedback on Child Care Center Draft Revised Licensing Standards 1

Stakeholder Engagement Overview 4

Lessons Learned from Child Care Stakeholder Listening Sessions 5

 Behavior Guidance 5

 Children with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities..... 6

 Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting..... 8

 Environmental Health..... 9

 Facility..... 10

 Furnishings, equipment, materials, and supplies..... 11

 Staff Qualifications..... 12

 Staff Training and Orientation 13

Lessons Learned from Child Care Provider Interviews 15

 Overview of Lessons Learned 15

 Clarity of Language and Implementation Challenges..... 16

 Administrative and Documentation Burden..... 16

 Training Requirements and Accessibility 16

 Concerns About Practicality in Daily Operations..... 16

 Support for Provider Autonomy 17

 Summary of Interview Feedback..... 17

Lessons Learned from Child Care Stakeholder Survey 17

 Survey Finding #1: Standards with unclear language..... 18

 Survey Finding #2: Standards most challenging to implement 18

 Survey Finding #3: Safe Environments 19

 Survey Finding #4: Support of Social, Emotional, and Educational Development 20

Conclusion..... 22

Stakeholder Engagement Overview

Child care is one of Minnesota's most essential resources, supporting the well-being of families, strengthening communities, and driving the state's economy. Recognizing this critical role, the 2021 Minnesota Legislature directed the Department of Human Services (DHS) to collaborate with the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) to [develop revised licensing standards](#) for family child care and child care centers. The Legislature emphasized that the final proposal must be “grounded in national regulatory best practices” and “must protect the health and safety of child and be child-centered, family friendly, and fair to providers.”

Minnesota Rules Chapter 9503 which governs the licensing of child care centers was originally established in the 1980s and has not undergone a comprehensive update since its inception. However, incremental updates have been made in Minnesota Statutes Chapter 245A, in areas such as child care center training, infant safe sleep practices, and health and safety requirements. The disconnect between updates to the statute and the outdated rule has created challenges for child care center providers, licensors, and families, who often struggle to navigate the licensing requirements and determine where to find relevant information.

The revised licensing standards aim to address this challenge by consolidating all child care center standards into a new statute, Chapter 245K. The new standards are intended to be organized for ease of use and aligned with the legislative directive to be child-centered, family friendly, fair to providers, and grounded in regulatory best practices.

With these objectives in mind, DHS contracted with NARA to apply their expertise in drafting revised licensing standards rooted in national regulatory best practices. In October 2022, DHS administered an initial survey for stakeholders to provide feedback to [guide Minnesota's revised licensing standards](#). NARA delivered an initial draft of the standards to DHS in March 2023, which was then refined through collaboration with other Minnesota state agencies, licensors, and subject matter experts.

On April 10-11, 2024, DHS held two online information sessions on the draft licensing standards, attended by over 900 stakeholders. The [first public draft](#) was released on April 22, 2024, followed by a series of 23 listening sessions across Minnesota, engaging over 950 participants and generating 2,498 pieces of individual feedback. These sessions were complemented by additional stakeholder engagement through email correspondence, with more than 300 emails received and responded to between April 22 and August 1, 2024.

The project team also worked with Wilder Research to engage providers via one-on-one interviews for randomly selected providers and an online survey. More details of how these engagement efforts were conducted can be found in the relevant sections, on pages 14 and 16 respectively.

This report presents a comprehensive summary of the key themes and insights gathered from these feedback efforts. The feedback reflects input from a broad range of stakeholders, including child care providers, parents, advocates, licensors, and early childhood organizations. The analysis identifies common concerns, recommendations, and opportunities for improvement, ensuring that the next draft of licensing standards promote high-quality, accessible, and sustainable child care services throughout Minnesota.

Lessons Learned from Child Care Stakeholder Listening Sessions

During the listening sessions, feedback was collected on eight priority topic areas. Each priority topic that we received feedback on is outlined in this report, using the following format.

1. **DHS Context:** This section describes the Department’s intent at the time the draft licensing standards were released in April 2024 and provides a brief overview of the changes from current language. This is background information only and doesn’t convey the Department’s intent for moving forward in the next draft.
2. **Key Themes of Feedback:** This section contains a summary of key themes that were identified as part of the analysis of listening session feedback. It also contains direct quotes that were captured from stakeholders via post-it notes during the listening sessions, which are noted with quotation marks.
3. **Summary:** The summary contains a brief overview of what the DHS context and key themes stated above.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the feedback DHS received from Minnesota’s child care community on the draft revised licensing standards. This feedback will inform the next draft of the revised licensing standards.

Behavior Guidance

DHS Context

The Department’s goal in updating the behavior guidance language was to add definitions to promote greater clarity of expectations, and to update the list of prohibited and positive behavior strategies to be in keeping with updated best practices. We also changed the “Separation” language to allow for separating a child from the group physically if there are behavior issues that aren’t addressed well by other methods; however we prohibited this separation for infants and toddlers. In addition, we added suggested language that providers must notify DHS with 48 hours of disenrolling a child. The intent was to allow for more data on disenrollment to be created, so that DHS could understand the extent of this practice.

Key Themes of Feedback

Requirement to report disenrollment of a child to DHS

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the requirement to report a child’s dismissal or expulsion to the state within 48 hours.

“When a child is dis-enrolled, it is not okay to have to report to the State within 48 hours. This is a lot of work and a great burden.”

Excessive documentation

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the amount of required documentation related to behavior guidance, feeling the requirements are excessive and limit provider autonomy. There was particular concern about the requirement to review behavior plans every 60 days.

"Reviewing the behavior plan every 60 days seems excessive, especially considering that IEP teams only meet 1-2 times/yr."

"Behavior Guidance - Too much documentation."

Improvements in DHS behavior guidance forms

Suggestions were made for easier forms with more options to streamline documentation, including a DHS-created Behavior Plan template.

"Will DHS include a behavior plan template?"

Increased parent engagement

Stakeholders suggested promoting increased parental involvement in behavior plans, with suggestions to include specific verbiage requiring parents to participate in behavior management strategies.

"Can we include verbiage on parents needing to participate / be willing to help with behavior plan?"

Clarity of definitions

Stakeholders requested clearer definitions and standards, especially regarding the use of separation and prohibited actions, as well as a clearer process for deciding when to send a child home or exclude them from care.

"Behavior Guidance - Separation - What is the definition for DHS standard?"

Summary

Providers expressed positive feedback about the updates to behavior guidance terminology, prohibited practices, and positive practices in the draft standards. However, providers also expressed concerns that the language would limit provider autonomy, such as by prohibiting toddlers from being separated from the group and by requiring that DHS be notified of child disenrollment or expulsion within 48 hours. In addition, some providers shared concerns that there was too much documentation required in the section. Finally, many providers expressed support for DHS to create a "Behavior Plan template" which license holders could use.

Children with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities

DHS Context

DHS updates to this section were intended to increase coordination between various parties when accommodating the needs of a child with a disability or special health care need. In addition, language was

added to promote inclusion of all children in child care activities, so long as the child didn't have a medical reason for not being able to participate. DHS revisions also meant to consolidate the different requirements for allergy prevention found in [MN Statutes 245A.41, Subdivision 1](#) and the Child Care for Children with Special Health Care Needs requirements found in [MN Rules 9503.0065](#) into a single coherent section. In addition, a new subdivision was added to account for "temporary physical needs" (e.g., an injured child temporarily needing a cast or brace), with simplified documentation requirements that were distinct from the more robust documentation required for an Individual Child Care Program Plan (ICCPP).

Key Themes of Feedback

Administrative burden and complexity

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the additional administrative burden of coordinating and managing Individual Child Care Program Plans (ICCPPs) with the new language. Stakeholders mentioned that the process of reviewing and updating these plans can be overwhelming, especially for programs that serve large numbers of children with special needs.

"Why will we need to coordinate ICCPPs to be reviewed now? How would that work?"

Clarity and further guidance needed on processes

Stakeholders expressed confusion over the specific processes involved in creating, reviewing, and managing ICCPPs. They asked for clearer definitions of key terms and guidelines, such as what constitutes a "severe disability or chronic illness" and for clearer guidance on who needs to review and "sign off" on ICCPP documentation. There was also a desire for further guidance on the new inclusion language in Subdivision 3(a), and specifically what constitutes "professional guidance" and "appropriate training" for including children with special health care needs or disabilities in activities.

"Subd 3(a) What is the definition of a severe disability or a chronic illness? What are the resources/training available that would be appropriate to fulfill this expectation?"

"245K.15, Subd 3(a) Inclusion: This language is new(?). Very helpful to have this in writing. 'Professional guidance' - who? 'Appropriate training' - who?"

Challenges of coordinating with various parties

Stakeholders emphasized the difficulty of coordinating with school districts on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and the challenges of adapting these plans to a child care context. In addition, the new language which calls for child care health consultants to be involved in the process of coordinating supports for children raised concerns; stakeholders wondered whether it was sensible to have health consultants involved in that role.

Summary

Overall, stakeholders expressed a desire for clearer guidance on some of the new language in this section. Some stakeholders appreciated that the new language gave clearer expectations of how providers should support children who need accommodations to participate. Others worried that adding more regulation in this area

could lead to unintended consequences if providers aren't given adequate resources or staff training to meet children's needs.

Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting

DHS Context

Currently, [Minnesota Rules 9503.0005](#), subpart 9 defines "clean" as, "free from dirt or other contaminants that can be detected by sight, smell, or touch." [MN Rules 9503.0140](#), subpart 9 then specifies that, "The indoor and outdoor space and equipment of the center must be clean." These two provisions taken together are the main regulations currently used to ensure a clean environment in Minnesota child care centers. The draft Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting section in 245K.31 aimed to give more detailed definitions that distinguished and provided details on how to clean, sanitize, and disinfect a program space to reduce contaminants and germs. It provided a "cleaning frequency" section specifying how often certain items must be cleaned, and also gave detailed instructions on mixing and selecting cleaning products.

Key Themes of Feedback

Practicality of cleaning standards

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the practicality and feasibility of adhering to stringent cleaning requirements, such as the frequency of shampooing carpets and washing toys.

"Frequency of carpet shampooing: Shampooing carpets every six months in a large facility is not feasible. Small area rugs cleaning daily: Really?"

Definitions and consistency

There were calls for clearer definitions of cleanliness and consistent application of the rules. Concerns highlight the need for a realistic understanding of what constitutes a clean and safe environment in child care settings.

"Cleaning frequency, for 'outdoor space equipment must be clean': please define clean."

Specific item concerns

Comments focused on specific items such as pacifiers and diaper bins, questioning the necessity and frequency of cleaning these items.

"Pacifiers cleaned daily is excessive. If labeled should be cleaned daily."

Cleaning supplies needed

Stakeholder feedback included concerns about the types of cleaning supplies recommended and the practicality of some equipment, such as foot/wrist activated sinks, which might distract children.

"Foot/wrist activated handwashing sinks will become a 'game' for children (a distraction)"

Water bottles

Stakeholders felt it wasn't clear what the policy was on whether they can allow parents to bring a child's reusable water bottle.

“Water bottles: yes? no? help!”

Summary

Overall stakeholders called for a simplified, less prescriptive approach to this section. They also wanted further clarity on specific cleaning products or supplies that would be approved under the new language, and clarity on whether children bringing their own reusable water bottles would be permitted.

Environmental Health

DHS Context

The Minnesota legislature directed DHS to work with NARA to ensure the draft revised licensing standards were “grounded in national regulatory best practices,” and “must protect the health and safety of children and be child-centered, family-friendly, and fair to providers.” NARA consultants highlighted the growing national recognition of the hazards to children’s health posed by lead contaminants in soil, in the water supply, and also to the presence of radon in a child care facility. In accordance with the legislative directive, the DHS draft standards included best practice licensing standards in each of these areas, requiring child care centers to test for the presence of these contaminants, to determine if there was a hazardous amount present, and then to take measures to mitigate the hazard. There were also requirements to document testing and mitigation, and to notify parents if hazardous levels of lead in the soil, lead in the water supply, or radon were detected.

Key Themes of Feedback

Practicality and cost of new environmental health standards

Child care providers raised concerns that these new requirements would impose a financial burden on providers. They wondered about the evidence for why these standards were necessary. They also asked that if the requirements were to be maintained, that the state fund the cost of testing and mitigation.

“Pay for the test we need or have the state come do it for us at no charge - for lead, radon, etc.”

Clarity of expectations

Stakeholders shared that further guidance was needed on many of the environmental health standards. For instance, what the definition of “exposed dirt” was, whether this applied to gardening areas, and how often testing needed to be repeated. In addition, stakeholders questioned what mitigation costs would be involved if contaminants were found, and how they would be able to identify qualified contractors for mitigation work.

"Water and radon testing - who has to complete the test? Cost: will it be prohibitive? Finding contractors in rural area?"

Summary

Stakeholders overall felt that these new standards were too costly and still had many unanswered questions about how they would be implemented in a practical way. They expressed sympathy for protecting children's health but felt that the new requirements were unworkable unless the state could provide much greater clarity on the implementation and partner with providers to cover the costs of testing and mitigation.

Facility

DHS Context

The Department's updates to the Facility requirements were intended to bring Minnesota closer to alignment with national licensing best practices, in particular some of the recommendations in the national [Caring for Our Children](#) framework. For instance, the 245K draft requires a fire marshal inspection of child care center facilities every three years instead of only before initial licensure and with a "reasonable cause." It also updated the requirements for outdoor play areas to specify safe materials, fall zones, and shading standards for outdoor play. In addition, the draft standards prohibited the use of scented products, air fresheners, and aerosol sprays, and introduced a more specific indoor temperature range of 68 – 82 degrees Fahrenheit, instead of the current requirement in [Rule 9503.0155](#) that only specifies a minimum of 68 degrees. These changes were intended to make the child care environment more comfortable and safer for all children.

Key Themes of Feedback

Practical challenges in facility management

Several stakeholder comments focused on the practical challenges of meeting some of the facility-related requirements, such as the prohibition of personal cell phone use for offsite activities, the need for shade in outdoor play areas, and the fall surface requirements.

"Not being allowed to use a personal cell phone to meet requirements when not onsite (fieldtrips/walks) will be a barrier."

Concerns about ventilation and air quality requirements

Stakeholders raised concerns about ventilation and odor control, particularly in facilities that lack windows. They pointed out the difficulties in managing odors from diapers without proper ventilation and called for the state to define what odor control measures could be used if scented products can't be used and there are no windows to ensure ventilation. However, some providers commented that prohibiting scented products would be welcome for children and staff in their programs who are sensitive or allergic to these products.

"Subd 17 - Ventilation and use of scented products - for programs without windows, 10 poopy diapers can be tough to smell." And "Good to not allow essential oils / heavily scented stuff due to asthma and migraines potentially undiagnosed (Fabuloso!)."

Additional fire marshal inspection concerns

Concerns were also raised about moving to having a fire inspection every three years. They expressed that fire marshal inspectors can be inconsistent in their findings, and the uncertainty of having additional findings every three years would be challenging.

"Fire marshals must be consistent in applying code. They have been very inconsistent."

Summary

Stakeholders seem most concerned about the prospects of additional fire marshal inspections every three years, and the provisions around ventilation and use of scented products. There were also other concerns about specific requirements such as personal cell phone use when on walks, and indoor room temperature.

Furnishings, equipment, materials, and supplies

DHS Context

The Fall 2022 [Survey to guide revised child care licensing standards stakeholder report](#) found that the current Equipment and Supplies section ([MN Rules 9503.0060](#)) ranked as the second highest area where stakeholders saw the need for revisions to the current rule. In response, the DHS public draft added more flexibility in terms of defining “sets” of equipment, instead of giving specific quantities in some instances. Language was added to allow equipment to be made inaccessible to children by “rotating” it out at different times, provided the equipment was still available on site. There were various other updates to respond to stakeholder concerns as well, particularly around easels for toddlers and removing outdated requirements.

Key Themes of Feedback

Debate over appropriate level of flexibility with equipment lists

Many stakeholders appreciated the changes to add more flexibility, such as adding a definition of “sets” and allowing for some materials to be rotated or made inaccessible. There were other stakeholders who wished that more flexibility had been granted, and that the state would move away from a specific list of equipment that was required, and towards broader categories of items. However, introducing moving to this more general approach, when shared with stakeholders, raised concerns about different licensor interpretations.

"I appreciate 245K.14, Subd. 3 'accessibility of equipment' as an addition."

"Good start, but I was hoping that there would be more flexibility, especially when too many things in rooms are causing undesirable behaviors."

Confusion over conflicting requirements

Some stakeholders were concerned with new requirements for both “musical instruments” and “music making toys,” in addition to concerns about the requirement to have two sets of blankets for infants. These specific concerns were due to DHS oversights during the drafting process and will be corrected in the next draft.

“Why are blankets being required for each crib? We can’t have blankets in cribs.”

Summary

Overall stakeholders expressed mostly positive feedback on the revised draft. However, there are some providers who wish for greater flexibility and a move away from a detailed list of equipment. This wish conflicts with concerns that were expressed about differing licenser interpretations if the equipment needed isn’t clearly specified.

Staff Qualifications

DHS Context

The Fall 2022 [Survey to guide revised child care licensing standards stakeholder report](#) found that the current staff qualifications section (MN Rules [9503.0030](#) – [9503.0034](#)) ranked as the highest area where stakeholders saw the need for revisions to the current rule. In response to this feedback, a staff qualifications work group of child care center providers, provider associations, early childhood organizations, and licensing staff met over a series of four monthly meetings to better define what an improved set of staff qualifications could be. The public draft released in April 2024 contained two different definitions of education – “post-secondary general education” and “post-secondary child development education” – which intended to expand what kinds of coursework could count towards someone qualifying as a child care center teacher or assistant teacher. See the [Staff Qualifications Fact Sheet](#) for more details. The progression of Teacher and Assistant Teacher qualification options was also updated to feature new qualification options (such as apprenticeships or being a Registered Nurse), and in some cases the amount of hours of experience and formal education was lowered. In addition, the Director qualifications were updated to include additional formal education but also to specify that the Director could serve as a Teacher in any classroom as needed.

Key Themes of Feedback

Educational requirements and barriers

Many stakeholders expressed concerns over the requirement that 50% of educational credits used to qualify for a position must be in “Child development education.” While the intent was to have “child development education” defined broadly such that this 50% criteria would be easily met, stakeholders pointed out issues where this may restrict the ability to hire child care staff.

“Why are you making it harder to qualify potential teachers/assistant teachers by requiring the college transcript to have 50% child development classes?”

Flexibility in staff roles

Stakeholders expressed the desire for more flexibility in how they use their existing staff, such as aides and assistant teachers, without the need for cumbersome requirements. They expressed support for aides in particular to have more independence and for fewer documentation requirements for the use of Experienced Aides.

“We want to keep aides being able to be alone at the beginning and the end of the day.”

“Make experienced aide without burden of documentation. Very cumbersome.”

Need for further clarity

People expressed the need for greater clarity on how certain language would be operationalized or tracked, such as the hour tracking for unqualified substitutes or the requirement for “hours of pediatric nursing experience” for Registered Nurses looking to be teacher-qualified.

“Teachers - Nursing license - why specific hours in pediatric one? How is that tracked?” and

“We are treated like school with Curriculum, Requirements But lack the resources of having one-on-one or higher pay.”

Operational challenges and concerns

Centers shared concerns that these new requirements may impact their ability to hire staff and operate. Some asked if they would be grandfathered in if these standards were passed, or what resources would be made available to help them comply.

“We are treated like school with Curriculum, Requirements But lack the resources of having one-on-one or higher pay.”

“are current staff grandfathered in with new requirements?”

Summary

Overall stakeholders liked some of the additional flexibility offered by this section with some of the lesser qualification options. However, they wanted to see more emphasis on reducing burdensome documentation for certain positions, and also were concerned about the two-part definition of Education and the requirement to have 50% of college credits be in “child development” coursework areas.

Staff Training and Orientation

DHS Context

The current training requirements for child care centers are found in [MN Statutes 245A.40](#). The most significant change in the 245K draft was the introduction of a “Child Care Basics” training, which would be required within 90 days of initial hire for all directors, program staff persons, substitutes, and unsupervised volunteers. The

intent of this training was that it would be a DHS-developed training, freely and easily accessible to all child care center staff, which covers the most critical elements of what it means to work in a licensed child care center. The idea was to provide a solid foundation and high-level expectations for child care center staff across Minnesota.

In addition, the 245K.09 section now requires that Orientation must cover the center's policy on the exclusion of sick children, in accordance with the requirements laid out in 245K.18 (what had formerly been MN Rules 9503.0080). 245K.09 also requires that staff training information be documented in a manner prescribed by the Commissioner. These changes were meant to ensure child care center staff are knowledgeable about all essential policies and procedures, and to bring consistency and clarity to how training is documented.

Key Themes of Feedback

Questions on Child Care Basics training

The biggest area of feedback from child care stakeholders was to ask for more details on the Child Care Basics training requirements defined in 245K.09, Subdivisions 1 and 3. There were questions about how much the training would cost, who would develop it, what format it would be offered in (e.g., virtual on-demand/asynchronous, virtual live training, in-person training), and how long the training would be. Others wanted to know if the training would be accessible and have trainers available in all areas throughout the state.

“Child Care basics training - what is it? Started? Trainers in ALL areas?” and “Subd 3- Child care basics training: how long will training be? Will DHS create it? How accessible? Cost to programs?”

Standardization and portability

Stakeholders expressed hopefulness about the possibility for Child Care Basics to provide standardized, essential information for their staff. They emphasized that the training must be in Develop and that tracking of staff's completion of the training should also be standardized and portable from center to center. Stakeholders also saw the benefits of standardizing the documentation for training, and even having a DHS-standardized procedure or training for doing “name-to-face” checks during transition times. However, other stakeholders expressed concerns that current DHS forms for training are confusing and they wanted to see improvement in this area before forms are required.

“DHS forms for this [training] are confusing and complicated and leads to a lot of citations with dates and matching those.”

“Will Child Care Basics training be valid in all centers? Portable?”

Concerns with training hours

Stakeholders expressed concerns that having both Orientation and Child Care Basics training completed for staff before having unsupervised direct contact with children would be a barrier. Stakeholders also expressed frustration as to why CPR and First Aid trainings don't count towards annual in-service hours. Overall, some stakeholders expressed the desire that the Draft 245K do more to make the required trainings more manageable to meet for their staff.

Summary

Overall, stakeholders expressed mixed but somewhat positive feedback on the Child Care Basics training concept. They expressed that they saw value in the concept of having a standardized training developed by DHS to help build foundational knowledge of the child care center environment for their staff. However, they also had many questions about how this training requirement would work in practice, and how that may impact their ability to have staff meet the required trainings in a timely way.

Lessons Learned from Child Care Provider Interviews

Between June 12 and July 19, 2024, Wilder Research conducted interviews with child care providers to gather feedback on the draft licensing standards released in April 2024. Sample stratification was used to create a representative sample based on the following program attributes:

- Region: The seven-county metro area (Ramsey, Hennepin, Washington, Anoka, Carver, and Scott counties) and Minnesota's other 80 counties, known collectively as Greater Minnesota.
- Licensed Capacity (0-50 licensed capacity, 51-100, and 101 or greater)

Wilder Research sent emails to providers in batches on the following dates:

- June 12, 2024: 30 child care centers (CCC) providers
- June 19, 2024: 50 CCC providers
- June 25, 2024: 40 CCC providers
- July 7, 2024: 50 CCC providers
- July 8, 2024: 50 CCC providers

From the 220 outreach emails sent, Wilder research was able to conduct thirteen in-depth interviews lasting between 15 minutes and 1 hour. During these interviews the interviewer took high level notes on general themes, key takeaways, and any particularly interesting points. Interviews were recorded and those recordings were sent to a transcription service to produce a text document of the interviews for analysis. Any information that could potentially identify a provider was removed from the transcript text to maintain the provider's anonymity.

Overview of Lessons Learned

The interviews provided rich insight into the sections of the draft licensing standards that child care center providers identified as most significant. From these discussions, there was a blend of optimism for the clarity and safety improvements that the new draft licensing standards could bring, balanced with concerns about the practicality of certain requirements. Below are selected insights from the draft licensing standards interviews with child care center providers, accompanied by direct quotes from providers to illustrate their perspectives.

Clarity of Language and Implementation Challenges

Providers frequently highlighted the need for clearer language in various sections of the draft standards. Many interviewees noted that certain terms and requirements were difficult to interpret, such as those found in the sections on 245K.13 Behavior Guidance and 245K.31 Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting.

Example of feedback: The definition of "persistent unacceptable behavior" could lead to confusion or misinterpretation, potentially conflating general behavior issues with safety concerns.

"In the old guidelines [MN Rules 9503], part of the definition included 'requires an increased amount of staff guidance and time.'" I don't see that language in here anymore. [In Draft 245K] They kind of labeled persistent unacceptable behavior as a safety concern. It's not always a safety concern. Persistent unacceptable behavior could be children who just demand a lot of attention."

Administrative and Documentation Burden

A recurring theme in the interviews was the perception of increased administrative burden due to new documentation requirements. Providers were particularly concerned about the need to document every instance of specific actions, such as name-to-face checks during transitions between classrooms. An additional concern was whether they would be required to have dual records (paper and digital) for attendance and other daily logs, which some viewed as redundant and time-consuming.

Example of feedback: Concerns about requiring documentation for every name-to-face check during transitions.

"There's something in here where you have to manually document that they changed rooms for that amount of time. I think that is micromanaging to an extreme. We have them accounted for, and we need to rely on the fact that our staff are counting."

Training Requirements and Accessibility

The introduction of the Child Care Basics training was generally welcomed, but providers sought more details on how this training would be delivered and integrated into existing requirements. Participants from rural areas emphasized the need for the training to be accessible online and available at no cost, as they faced challenges in accessing training sessions due to geographic constraints.

Example of feedback: Accessibility of Child Care Basics training

"The child care basics training, we were told at the listening session that it would be developed by DHS and available for free at all times so people can access it at their own pace. We're excited about it... Just enhancing that yes, if this is something that has to be done, then it needs to be on the state side."

Concerns About Practicality in Daily Operations

Providers raised several concerns about the practicality of new standards. Some specific requirements that elicited concerns were related to new language in the 245K.12 Naps and Rest section which seemed to require

quiet activities at nap time, and requirements around when children can be separated from the group in the 245K.13 Behavior Guidance section.

Example of feedback: Concern about perceived requirement to offer silent activities at nap time.

"I don't think 30 minutes is an outrageous amount of time to ask a child to be quiet or still... If a 30-minute rest time is part of their day, then I think it's okay that they just be bored for 30 minutes if that's what they need to do."

Support for Provider Autonomy

While the draft standards aimed to enhance clarity and consistency, many providers expressed a desire for greater flexibility in implementation. They appreciated the efforts to outline specific expectations but felt that certain standards, such as those governing outdoor time and equipment use, could benefit from allowing providers to adapt based on their program's unique needs and circumstances.

Example of feedback: The need for greater flexibility for providers.

"We need to make sure these regulations recognize that we know our children and our programs best. It's not that we disagree with the intent, but sometimes there needs to be flexibility to apply it in a way that works in our setting."

Summary of Interview Feedback

The interviews revealed both enthusiasm and reservations about the draft standards. Providers welcomed the clearer guidelines and the emphasis on safety, but many also raised practical considerations that could impact their ability to effectively implement the new requirements. Overall, providers who were interviewed expressed hope that their feedback would help DHS to refine the standards to better support child care centers while maintaining a focus on safety and quality.

Lessons Learned from Child Care Stakeholder Survey

DHS worked with Wilder Research and the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) to develop an online survey to gather feedback on the draft licensing standards. The [survey went live](#) and was open from June 10 to July 31, 2024 for both family child care and child care centers, receiving responses from over 1,600 unique participants. The survey provided an opportunity for stakeholders to provide anonymous feedback on the draft revised child care licensing standards for either family child care or child care centers.

The survey allowed respondents to specify which section and subdivision of the draft they wanted to comment on, so that they could provide feedback directly on the provisions which most concerned them or which they most supported. The survey asked respondents about the clarity, value, and effort involved in implementing whichever given provision they chose to comment on. In addition, there was an open-ended comment box to share general feedback on the given section.

There was a total of 7,018 complete responses from 1,617 unique individuals to the survey. This included 815 people that completed only one subsection and 802 people that answered more than one subsection. On average, each individual provided feedback on 4.5 policy subsections. There were also three open-ended questions that received between 2,558 and 4,621 responses each.

DHS staff, with assistance from NARA consultants, analyzed the survey responses. The top findings from this analysis are presented below.

Survey Finding #1: Standards with unclear language

Participants were asked, "Thinking about the new draft language [in a section of the standards], do you understand the draft language?". 308 participants answered this question for at least 1 section of the draft licensing standards, with participants indicating whether they understood the standard or needed further clarity.

The top five sections where respondents indicated a need for more clarity or did not understand the standard were:

1. **245K.29 Sanitation and Health - Subdivision 7:** 64.7% of respondents needed clarity or did not understand the language around "sanitation and cleanliness" requirements. Providers highlighted terms like "free from dirt" as too vague and difficult to interpret in practical settings.
2. **245K.35 Environmental Health - Subdivision 1:** 44.4% of respondents expressed a need for more clarity. Respondents had questions regarding the scope and frequency of testing requirements for environmental hazards such as lead in the soil.
3. **245K.30 Attendance Records - Subdivision 2:** 42.9% of respondents found the documentation requirements for daily classroom attendance records unclear, particularly whether digital records were acceptable, and the level of detail required.
4. **245K.11 Child Care Program Plan and Activities - Subdivision 3:** 31.9% of respondents requested further clarification on "general activities," including terms like "suitable weather" for outdoor play, which they found to be too subjective.
5. **245K.28 Reporting Requirements - Subdivision 2 Other Reporting:** 31.8% of respondents reported a lack of clarity on the draft requirement of having to report to DHS "within 48 hours of when a child is disenrolled from the center for a behavioral reason."

Survey Finding #2: Standards most challenging to implement

Participants were also asked, "As a license holder, to what extent will you need to make changes to comply with the new draft standard?". 327 participants answered this question for at least 1 section of the draft licensing standards. The following sections were identified as the most challenging for implementation, as determined by the number of respondents that chose a given subdivision, and how many responded that "significant changes" would be required:

1. **245K.33 Transportation and Field Trip Requirements - Subdivision 4 Field Trip Requirements.** 60 people responded to this subdivision and 73.3% of those respondents indicated that implementing changes to field trip requirements would require significant adjustments. Providers highlighted challenges in adapting their current procedures to meet new documentation and supervision standards during off-site activities.
2. **245K.06 Teachers - Subdivision 2 Teacher Education and Experience Requirements.** 52 people responded to this subdivision and 36.5% of those respondents reported that the updated educational and experience requirements for teachers would require significant adjustments. Providers noted the difficulties in recruiting qualified staff and the need for additional professional development to meet the revised standards.
3. **245K.11 Child Care Program Plan and Activities - Subdivision 3 General Activities.** 43 people responded to this subdivision and 53.5% of those respondents reported that the changes proposed in this section would pose significant challenges. Concerns included the need to modify schedules to comply with guidelines for outdoor activities.
4. **245K.30 Attendance Records - Subdivision 2 Daily Classroom Attendance Records.** 27 people responded to this subdivision and 55.6% of those respondents identified significant challenges in meeting the new requirements for maintaining detailed attendance records. The need to document transitions between classrooms and verify attendance more rigorously were cited as areas requiring additional effort and resources.
5. **245K.07 Assistant Teachers - Subdivision 2 Assistant Teacher Education and Experience Requirements.** 23 people responded to this subdivision and 47.8% of those respondents indicated that adapting to new qualifications for assistant teachers would require significant changes. The challenges centered on the need to align hiring practices with the updated criteria and ensure that current assistant teachers meet the new standards.

Survey Finding #3: Safe Environments

To gauge perceptions of the potential safety benefits of the draft standards, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Children will be safer if the draft standard is adopted,” on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 10 is “strongly agree.” 373 participants answered this question for at least 1 section of the draft licensing standards.

The five sections that received the highest average rating and the lowest average rating are listed below. Please note that a lower average rating indicates strong disagreement that a licensing standard will protect health and safety, while a higher average rating indicates strong agreement that it will protect health and safety.

Top 5 Highest Average Rated Sections (in descending order)

1. **245K.04 Qualifications of Applicants and Staff - Subdivision 1 Definitions.** 59 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.41, with 5 being the most common rating.

2. **245K.06 Teachers - Subdivision 1 Teacher General Qualifications.**
16 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.31, with 1 being the most common rating.
3. **245K.09 Staff Orientation and Training - Subdivision 3 Child Care Basics Training Content.**
17 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.29, with 5 being the most common rating.
4. **245K.30 Attendance Records - Subdivision 2 Daily Classroom Attendance Records.**
28 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.18, with 5 being the most common rating.
5. **245K.09 Staff Orientation and Training - Subdivision 2 Orientation Training Content.**
17 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.18, with 5 being the most common rating.

Bottom 5 Lowest Average Rated Sections (in descending order)

1. **245K.14 Furnishings, Equipment, Materials, and Supplies - Subdivision 4 Required Equipment and Materials for Infants.**
19 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 4.00, with 1 being the most common rating.
2. **245K.11 Child Care Program Plan and Activities - Subdivision 3 General Activities.**
49 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 3.82, with 1 being the most common rating.
3. **245K.06 Teachers - Subdivision 2 Teacher Education and Experience Requirements.**
57 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 3.49, with 1 being the most common rating.
4. **245K.33 Transportation and Field Trip Requirements - Subdivision 4 Field Trip Requirements.**
79 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 2.95, with 1 being the most common rating.
5. **245K.29 Sanitation and Health - Subdivision 7 Sanitation and Cleanliness.**
18 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 2.94, with 1 being the most common rating.

Survey Finding #4: Support of Social, Emotional, and Educational Development

The fourth, and final objective of the survey related to the well-being of children in care. Survey participants were asked how much they agree with the statement “Children will have an environment that better supports social, emotional, or educational development if the draft standard is adopted on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is ‘strongly disagree’ and 10 is ‘strongly agree.’” 373 participants answered this question for at least 1 section of the draft licensing standards.

Top 5 Highest Average Rated Sections (in descending order)

- 1. 245K.09 Staff Orientation and Training - Subdivision 3 Child Care Basics Training Content.**
17 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.76, with 5 being the most common rating.
- 2. 245K.04 Qualifications of Applicants and Staff - Subdivision 1 Definitions.**
59 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.73, with 8 being the most common rating.
- 3. 245K.28 Reporting Requirements - Subdivision 2 Other Reporting.**
22 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 5.40, with 1 being the most common rating.
- 4. 245K.06 Teachers - Subdivision 1 Teacher General Qualifications.**
16 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 4.94, with 1 being the most common rating.
- 5. 245K.05 Directors - Subdivision 3 Director Functioning as a Teacher.**
15 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 4.80, with 1 being the most common rating.

Bottom 5 Lowest Average Rated Sections (in descending order)

- 1. 245K.05 Directors - Subdivision 2 Director or Designee Onsite.**
23 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 3.96, with 1 being the most common rating.
- 2. 245K.35 Environmental Health - Subdivision 1 Facility.**
21 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 3.76, with 1 being the most common rating.
- 3. 245K.11 Child Care Program Plan and Activities - Subdivision 3 General Activities.**
49 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 3.35, with 1 being the most common rating.
- 4. 245K.29 Sanitation and Health - Subdivision 7 Sanitation and Cleanliness.**
18 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 2.50, with 1 being the most common rating.
- 5. 245K.33 Transportation and Field Trip Requirements - Subdivision 4 Field Trip Requirements.**
79 people responded to this subdivision, with their responses yielding an average rating of 2.25, with 1 being the most common rating.

Conclusion

The feedback gathered through listening sessions, surveys, and interviews with child care providers has provided DHS with an in-depth understanding of how the current draft licensing standards would impact child care centers across Minnesota. The insights in this report highlight the strengths of the proposed standards, such as clearer guidelines and an emphasis on safety. The report also highlights areas that require further refinement to ensure practical implementation. Providers expressed optimism about the potential for these new standards, while emphasizing the need for flexibility, support, and clarification to effectively navigate the transition.

As the Minnesota Department of Human Services prepares another draft of the revised licensing standards, the key themes identified in this report will serve as critical guideposts. DHS will also continue to align the draft licensing standards with the legislative directive to be, “grounded in national regulatory best practices” and “must protect the health and safety of children and be child-centered, family friendly, and fair to providers.” Guided by insightful feedback from the child care community and the legislative directive, DHS will work to craft a set of standards that not only align with the latest research and best practices in child development but also respects the realities of the child care center field in Minnesota.