



The Valley

School readiness pilot almost off ground

By Tanner Kent
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — A multi-million dollar kindergarten readiness program is nearing implementation in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties.

With the ultimate goal of using quality child-care facilities as an ally in preparing young children for school, the Parent Aware program has two initiatives: to establish a rating system for child-care facilities, and then use that rating system to guide children — especially those of low-income families — into quality day cares.

“Child-care providers play a key role in the process of kindergarten readiness,” said Sue Larson, a Mankato resource specialist for Parent

Please see PILOT, Page B2

PILOT: Yearly child-care costs in area exceed \$5,000

Continued from Page B1

Aware. “And everyone should have the right to quality child care.”

Last October, the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation set aside \$6 million to establish three Parent Aware pilot programs — one in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties and two in the Twin Cities area. Since then local agencies have been working to get the program off the ground.

In Blue Earth and Nicollet County, the local chapter of

Child Care Resource and Referral has adopted the task of implementing the ratings system. Larson said there is already a waiting list to get into the first orientation meeting for the ratings process on Feb. 9, but more are planned.

Those facilities that participate will submit to a number of reviews and be assigned a rating out of four stars. Both home- and center-based care facilities are welcome.

“For child-care providers who are serious about their

profession, this is a great way to have a voice,” Larson said. “And so far, there has been a lot of interest. I think that says a lot about our community.”

The second Parent Aware initiative is using the rating system to link quality facilities with area families. Part of the initial grant money was reserved for the purpose of creating child-care vouchers that can be redeemed at facilities scoring three or more stars in the Parent Aware rating system.

The second phase will probably be administered by the Minnesota Valley Action Council, although Executive Director John Woodwick said some details are yet to be worked out.

There is about \$600,000 available for the vouchers with individual vouchers worth about \$4,000 per year. According to a study released by the Children’s Defense Fund in 2007, yearly child-care costs in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties typically range from \$5,000 to \$6,000.