

Minnesota has one of the largest K-12 achievement gaps in the nation when comparing caucasian children to children of color. But these achievement gaps begin as early as 18 months as opportunity gaps. Therefore, to solve the issue of achievement and opportunity gaps, Minnesota must prioritize early childhood investments.

The single best investment the state can make is targeted early childhood investments in our most vulnerable children

In the 2017 Legislative session, Think Small's advocacy will build upon the momentum of significant investments in early care and education and will support policies that: **1** Prioritize increased access to high quality early care and education for children with high needs, **2** Increase support for early learning professionals, and **3** Effectively close the opportunity gap.

The following steps will be taken:

- **Increase the number of Parent Aware rated programs and allow programs to maintain or improve their Parent Aware ratings**
- **Better align public funds to increase the number of children receiving high quality early care and education**
- **Expand access for children, ages 1 to kindergarten entry, from families with low incomes to high-quality early care and education programs by advocating funding for flexible, parent-directed scholarships**
- **Improve Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to assure more children from families with low incomes can access high quality care**
- **Support the sustainable career pathways of early learning professionals**

(continued from reverse side)

Think Small believes that placing a priority on children and their families through **access to high quality early childhood education is critical to closing Minnesota's opportunity gap**, thus eliminating the state's achievement gap. Policy decisions that are in the best interest of children are in the best interest of communities and thus Minnesota's future economic development.

Throughout the legislative session, Think Small will educate policy makers and the general public about the **value of high quality early childhood education** in a model driven by family choice and a variety of delivery options to best **meet the needs of children and families**.

Based on our extensive work with child care providers Think Small believes that by prioritizing investments in childcare, Minnesota can achieve a triple bottom line –

1. **Contributing** to positive developmental outcomes for young children,
2. **Fostering** women's economic empowerment, and
3. **Supporting** business performance through increased employee productivity, lower turnover, and reduced absenteeism.

Definitions

Achievement Gap: *The disparity in educational outcomes between children of color and caucasian children. These differences are often linked to family income.*

Opportunity Gap: *The significant differences that exist between children from low-income families and more affluent families regarding access to quality early learning experiences.*

High Needs: *Children with families that are low income, English Language Learners, Homeless and children with disabilities.*

Early Childhood: *prenatal to grade three.*