

From the Early Learning Council:

Early Learning Council members are responsible for providing recommendations to the Governor and Legislature that will effectively create a high quality, early-childhood system in Minnesota that will help improve educational outcomes for all children. To that end, we have developed a set of recommendations for the 2018 Legislative Session, using the set of guiding principles shown at right. As we make these recommendations, the Council would like to stress that we are very committed to not taking money from one early childhood program to fund another. We also recognize that this is not a budget year and that the state may be facing a deficit, therefore we would like to emphasize that these requests do not reflect what we would be asking for if the circumstances were different.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1) Healthy development begins prenatally;
 - 2) Equitable representation is needed to advance racial equity;
 - 3) Thriving families and communities depend on empowered parents and communities;
 - 4) Policy should be shaped by research and authentic community input; and
 - 5) A “whole family” approach should be embedded into more early childhood practices.
 - 6) Safe and stable housing is essential for families to thrive.
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Recommendations:

1. Continue to Expand Current Investments

We are proud of the significant increases in funding for Voluntary PreK, Early Learning Scholarships and home visiting. While we recognize and applaud the investments of the Governor and Legislature, we know there is still a lot of work to do. Thousands of parents and caregivers are still on waiting lists for programs. It is essential we maintain not only our current investments, but also prioritize expanding future funding and opportunities to children and families most in need for the following early childhood support and resources:

- a. Child Care Assistance Program
- b. Early Learning Scholarships
- c. Head Start
- d. Home Visiting Program
- e. Parent Aware
- f. All local-education programs including Voluntary Pre-K, Early Childhood Screening, School Readiness, School Readiness Plus, Early Childhood Family Education and Early Childhood Special Education. *Our hope would be that VPK, School Readiness and School Readiness Plus funding and regulations would become streamlined.*
- g. Health insurance for children

2. Strengthen the Early Childhood Infrastructure

Minnesota is on the cusp of realizing an early childhood infrastructure that gives our children the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving and succeeding. It is imperative that we fund strong pilot programs and strengthen our ability to access real data on the progress of our children. We should also provide pertinent resources for families and communities so no child “falls through the cracks”. We recommend fully funding the following programs:

- a. Help Me Grow - Using one central access point (via online or by phone), families and providers can access local resources through their school districts. The Help Me Grow expansion would allow for a more coordinated, statewide approach that effectively connects children, families, and providers to a broad array existing supports and services with care coordinators to help close the service gap.
- b. Kindergarten Entry Profile - Expanding the KEP statewide will allow the Minnesota Department of Education to provide support to districts to enhance collaboration with early learning providers and kindergarten teachers, share emerging best practices within and across regions, and analyze regional data to inform practice and improve future school readiness.
- c. Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) - As Minnesota continues to make investments in the early childhood system, the ECLDS will help measure what programs are most effective through a Return on Investment Analysis and will inform what we do in the future to ensure our children thrive.
- d. Address Early Childhood Workforce Needs - The Council recommends expanding the \$500,000 in DEED grant funding for communities to increase the supply of quality childcare providers to support regional economic development.
- e. Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation – The Council recommends sustaining and scaling up the Mental Health Consultation pilot. Mental Health Consultation is a mental health prevention service. It focuses on building adult capacity to support infant and young children’s emotional development and to prevent, identify, or reduce mental health challenges. Mental Health Consultation has prevented the expulsion of traumatized children from childcare.

3. Community Informed Approach (NEW)

The Council recommends funding the Community Solutions Fund for Healthy Childhood Development. In order to address the persistent opportunity and achievement gaps between white children and children of color our state must increase funding and opportunities for children of color and American Indian children beginning prenatally. The Community Solutions Fund for Healthy Child Development would be housed within the Minnesota Department of Health and the funding would be used to advance community-led and driven initiatives.