

What Can Be Done At The Local Level To Tackle The Achievement Gap And Child Care Shortage Crises?

While the workgroup was contemplating statewide policy recommendations for the Legislature outlined in the Crisis Work Group Roadmap for Action and fixes that can be made by the incoming Walz administration, ideas were also raised about what can be done at the local level in communities all around the state to address the dual crises of achievement gaps and the child care shortage. Here are some examples that Crisis Work Group members provided to spark these efforts in other communities around the state.

- Every economic development region in the state is served by one of six regional Initiative Foundations, each charged with being responsive to their own local community to strengthen their regional economy and communities. Early Care and Education (ECE) is a critical part of that community strength and interested local partners (employers, ECE providers, parents, advocates and others) should reach out to their Initiative Foundation to connect with specific efforts to identify and address local needs.
 - Traditionally, ECE professionals are not viewed as business people. Given the fact that they both operate businesses critical to local economic success, and that their services support other employers, ECE professionals/business owners should be invited and encouraged to become part of their local business community, including membership in local chambers of commerce.
 - Place-based initiatives such as the Northside Achievement Zone, Every Hand Joined, Northfield Promise, Partner for Student Success and the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood focused on supporting ECE providers of color to help them improve their quality and to help their scholars access those high-quality programs, including strong advocacy for Early Learning Scholarship expansion.
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- Leadership at all levels and within both the public and private sectors should find ways to publicly celebrate quality Parent Aware-rated ECE providers. About 2,600 ECE programs in all parts of Minnesota have volunteered to adopt kindergarten-readiness best practices through Parent Aware, and research finds Minnesota children in all types and sizes of quality programs are making significant gains on kindergarten-readiness best measures. Community leaders need to celebrate the commitment of those early educators to quality, so other providers will follow in their footsteps.
 - The Voices and Choices for Children Coalition has proposed a “Community Solutions Fund” that would provide state funding for communities to flexibly advance locally generated approaches to improving outcomes for children of color and American Indian children prenatal to 3rd grade.