

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CRISIS WORK GROUP 2020 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

In the fall of 2018, a broad group of organizations came together to address two crises impacting Minnesota's young children: 1) Worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps, which stem in part from early education opportunity gaps; and 2) A shortage of quality early care and education (ECE) opportunities for children statewide.

In 2020, legislators can address these challenges at the same time by enacting two-for-one solutions that:

- Address gaps by targeting additional supports to help low-income children access quality ECE opportunities.
- Grow quality ECE supply statewide, supporting all young children's school readiness.

Following are the group's session priorities:

INVEST IN FIXING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS & SHORTAGE.

Increase the number of flexible, targeted Early Learning Scholarships to empower low-income children and families to access quality, Parent Aware-rated programs. Allow 1- and 2-Star rated programs to continue serving children to help grow quality supply.

- Background: Family income is a key predictor of the likelihood that a child will fall into achievement gaps, and low-income families are least able to afford quality. Scholarships help low-income children access ECE programs based in schools, centers, homes, churches and other nonprofits, as long as they're using kindergarten-readiness best practices, as measured by the Parent Aware ratings. Research finds that children in rated programs are making significant progress on kindergarten-readiness measures, and low-income children are making the largest gains.

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE PARENT AWARE RATINGS.

To ensure Parent Aware ratings remain as evidence-based and effective as possible, evaluate the ratings to inform improvements.

- Background: Ratings help parents find ECE programs that use kindergarten-readiness best practices, and Parent Aware coaches help providers adopt best practices. About 2,800 providers of all types have volunteered to adopt best practices through Parent Aware, and 86% report a positive experience.

IMPLEMENT KINDERGARTEN ENTRY ASSESSMENT. In 2018 the Office of the Legislative Auditor recommended that every child's readiness be assessed when they enter kindergarten as one strategy for ensuring that Minnesota's ECE system is serving children well.

- Background: Assessments are currently done with some children, but not all, and not in a uniform way. Assessment results are not always reported to the state, and the results that do reach the state are not made publicly available.

INVEST IN INCREASING SUPPLY OF QUALITY ECE PROGRAMS. To help increase the supply of quality, Parent Aware-rated ECE programs in rural, urban, and suburban settings, make direct investments in supports for child care start-up and expansion, business development, and facilities. Link investments to the Parent Aware ratings to ensure the two-for-one that comes with increasing the supply of *quality* ECE opportunities.

- Background: In some parts of the state, there are as few as two quality ECE slots for every ten young children who could use them. This is creating a crisis for parents who need to work and children who need quality programs to get ready for school.

Members of the Work Group stand ready to help leaders address Minnesota's ECE shortage and achievement gaps. More background is available at ThinkSmall.org/crisis.

