



**➔ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges to the child care industry.**

- Child care was in a financially precarious position before the pandemic, and it has only gotten worse. Programs are at risk of closing.
- Care is more expensive during pandemic due to supplies and staffing requirements.

**➔ The pandemic has also highlighted that child care is essential for children, families, and our economic recovery.**

- Child care providers around the state stepped up to take care of children of essential workers.
- Young children and families have endured stressful situations during the pandemic to varying degrees. Quality early childhood experiences are one way to buffer these stresses and promote resilience.

**➔ Ensuring adequate supply of quality child care is a statewide issue, and we must continue to prioritize it. These policy solutions will help move us toward a more effective and equitable early care and education system in Minnesota.**

***1. Expand access for children, birth to kindergarten entry, from families with low incomes to high quality early care and education programs by advocating funding for flexible, parent-directed scholarships.***

- Scholarships are an equitable way to support children. Rather than “something for everyone,” scholarships provide resources to those who most need them. They are a crucial tool for closing the opportunity gaps facing Minnesota.
- Scholarships help families. They also support a mixed-delivery ecosystem of early care and education programs that is flexible and effective statewide.
- Well-funded scholarships help support wages for child care professionals. They also incentivize providers to participate in Parent Aware and serve low-income children.
- Scholarships could be improved by raising the cap so that they cover the full cost of year-round, all-day care in high-quality programs.



(continued from reverse side)

**2. Increase the number of financially sustainable Parent Aware rated programs and allow programs to maintain or improve their Parent Aware ratings.**

- Quality child care is important because children who receive quality care are more likely to succeed later on in school and life.<sup>1</sup>
- Accessing quality early learning programs helps narrow the opportunity gap, giving children from all backgrounds a fair shot at success. By increasing the reach of Parent Aware, we can increase the number of children in quality programs.

**3. Support the sustainable career pathways of early learning professionals.**

- It is challenging to recruit and retain early childhood educators because of low pay. Child care workers in Minnesota earn, on average, \$11.44 per hour. We have seen how essential child care providers are, and we must do better to ensure they are compensated fairly.
- The higher education system for educating early childhood teachers needs to be accessible, coordinated, efficient and effective. Coursework needs to address racial bias as well as prepare all teachers to work with an increasingly racially and linguistically diverse Minnesota.

**3. Improve tracking and data collection of children's program participation and outcomes.**

***We support recommendations outlined in the 2018 Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) report on the state's Early Childhood systems. In the report, the OLA recommends four important and relevant improvements to how state systems work with and share data:***

- Early Childhood systems including MDE, MDH, and DHS should implement a universal identification number for children participating in early childhood programs.
- Require kindergarten readiness assessments for children entering kindergarten and complete a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of early childhood programs.
- Improve program coordination by broadening the authority for early childhood systems to share individual-level data from early childhood programs.
- Collect attendance rates and dates of participation for children in early childhood programs as well as data on the number of children who are not screened.