

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CRISIS WORK GROUP

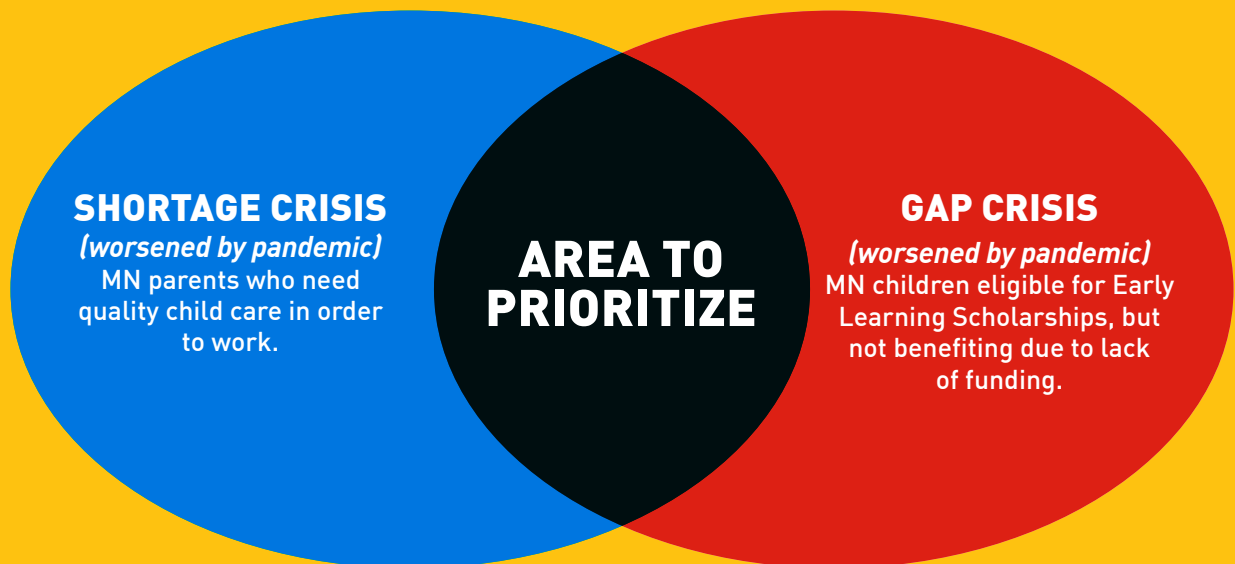
2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

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 and opportunity gaps, stemming in part from lack of access to quality child care; and 2) a shortage of quality child care supply for children statewide.

In 2021, legislators must also consider a third crisis, the coronavirus pandemic, which is having a devastating impact on Minnesota's young children and on Minnesota's child care sector. With parents dependent on the availability of child care to work and young children needing access to quality child care to stimulate their fast developing brains, the challenge we collectively face is clear: No child care, no economic recovery.

Our recommended solutions to the achievement gap and shortage crises are also solutions to the pandemic-related crisis. Our session priorities fall in the overlapping center of this chart.

PRIORITIZING CHILD CARE INVESTMENTS



INVEST IN SUPPORTS TO PRESERVE THE SUPPLY OF QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS. Invest in additional targeted grants to child care providers to help offset extra pandemic-related operational costs. Follow the model of the CARES Act-funded public health grants that were awarded from September to December. Tier grant amounts to program size and quality level.

- Background: Child care providers face extra operating costs and reduced revenue as a result of the pandemic. Continued grants will help offset these costs and losses, and will help keep programs afloat. Basing grants on program size and quality level will scale grants appropriately and reward programs that have adopted kindergarten readiness best practices.

INVEST IN TARGETED CHILD CARE FUNDING TO STIMULATE DEMAND AND CLOSE GAPS. Increase the number of flexible, targeted Early Learning Scholarships to empower low-income families to access quality, Parent Awarerated programs for their children.

- Background: Early Learning Scholarships 1) create consumer demand to fuel recovery of the devastated child care sector and 2) empower low-income families to access the quality child care programs that help children avoid falling into opportunity and achievement gaps.

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE PARENT AWARE RATINGS. To ensure the Parent Aware Ratings remain as evidence-based; school readiness-focused; culturally and linguistically relevant; and effective as possible, evaluate the ratings to inform improvements.

- Background: Ratings help parents find child care programs using kindergarten-readiness best practices, and Parent Aware coaches help providers adopt best practices. About 2,845 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 early care and education system is serving children well.

- Background: Assessments are currently done on 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.

NO CHILD CARE RECOVERY, NO ECONOMIC RECOVERY. With the acknowledgment that state government faces significant financial limitations and a projected budget shortfall, we recommend investing as much as possible as quickly as possible against these action steps. Doing so will help address Minnesota's pre-pandemic crises – a severe child care shortage and some of the nation's worst opportunity and achievement gaps – as well as the post-pandemic crisis – the threat of child care program closure at a time when workers in critical sectors desperately need child care. Beyond that, it will ensure that we have the system we need to address gaps and ensure the long-term strength of the state. Ignoring this pressing need would be devastating for Minnesota's children, parents, essential workers, taxpayers, employers, and economy.

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.

