

thinksmall

LEADERS IN EARLY LEARNING

Theory of Change

If children have access to quality child care with sufficient dosage, they will be ready for kindergarten. We stand on the result of being ready for kindergarten. Think Small's contribution is to ensure quality early care and education is available and accessible.



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“The population goal that we’re looking to meet in our new strategic plan, which was set by the Board of Directors, is to ensure that all children are ready for kindergarten. And for us then that means a **particular focus on those children that are directly impacted by the opportunity gaps**, or what some call the achievement gap. A good descriptor of that is income. You can fall into such a gap for other reasons, but a large percentage of children from low-income families will be at a much higher risk of falling into opportunity gaps. **For us, that’s exactly the work that we’re trying to do, and where we focus our efforts.**”

Barbara Yates, President and CEO of Think Small

Mission

Think Small’s mission is to advance quality care and education of children in their crucial early years.

Contribution

Think Small’s contribution is to ensure quality early care and education is available and accessible.

Our mission statement describes our purpose and answers the fundamental question

“Why does Think Small exist?”

To achieve this mission, Think Small must embrace a continuous improvement process in which we seek to answer the question:

“How do we advance quality care and education of children in their crucial early years?”

Accumulating evidence shows that access to quality early childhood experiences will result in positive outcomes for young children, both in regard to kindergarten readiness and lifelong success. There is a robust set of research findings, both locally and nationally, supporting this conclusion. Minnesota currently utilizes Parent Aware, the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), to measure quality early childhood experiences. As a QRIS, Parent Aware is unique in that it is developed and implemented through the lens of kindergarten readiness.

Statement of Equity

To support the full potential for every child, Think Small commits to **championing policies and practices of equity** that empower a just, inclusive, and equitable care and education system for children in their crucial early years.

Minnesota has one of the largest K-12 achievement gaps in the nation when comparing White children to children of color. These achievement gaps can start before a child’s first birthday, rooted in opportunity gaps, that is, the lack of sufficient quality early childhood experiences. Therefore, to close the achievement gap, Minnesota must close the opportunity gap by prioritizing early childhood investments. The single best investment the state can make is targeted early childhood investments in our most vulnerable children.



Results Based Accountability (RBA)

To begin answering the question of how we advance quality care and education of children in their crucial early years, Think Small is utilizing a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework to align its FY24-FY26 Strategic Plan to support the above theory of change. Within this RBA framework, the following terminology will be utilized:

→ *A result* is a population condition of well-being for children, adults, families and communities and is stated in plain language. Because it is about the well-being of a population, no one organization can 'own' the result. Rather, it is through partnership and a collective impact lens that success is achieved.

→ *An indicator* is a measure that helps quantify the achievement of a result and is articulated as a rate or a percentage. It is displayed as a trend line that has a baseline (how we're doing) and forecast (where we're heading).

→ *A strategy* is a collection of actions with the goal of improving results that represent our best thinking about what works.

→ *A performance measure* is a measure of how well a program, agency or strategy is working. The most important performance measures tell us whether the target population is better off by answering the following questions:

→ **How much did we do?**

→ **How well did we do it?**

→ **Is anyone better off?**

Population Level Result

With our theory of change and the evidence supporting the impact of access to quality early care and education in mind, Think Small has adopted the following

Population Level Result:

All children will be ready for kindergarten.



To be able to measure the success of this Population Level Result, Think Small has adopted the following

Population Level Indicator:

All children in the seven-county metro have access to quality early care and education programs.

In order for us to make progress on our population level result, we are well aware **we must address issues of racism and equity** to eliminate barriers to opportunities and achievement for our youngest learners. This includes the use of disaggregated data, whenever possible, to track our progress in closing the opportunity gaps that are persistent in Minnesota.

The Population Level Indicator intentionally uses the term “quality early care and education” to refer to settings utilizing kindergarten readiness best practices as demonstrated through evaluation; in Minnesota this is Parent Aware.

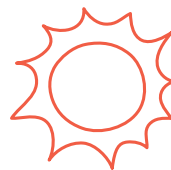
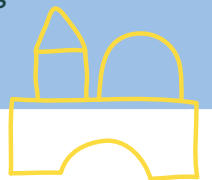
In the absence of a universal definition of kindergarten readiness, Think Small has developed our own definition.



Kindergarten Readiness

Think Small defines kindergarten readiness as the successful demonstration of progress across the 9 developmental domains as described in Minnesota’s Early Childhood Indicators of Progress at kindergarten entry.

Following the RBA framework requires that data be continuously collected on the Population Level Indicator to show success. However, Minnesota currently does not have statewide data on kindergarten readiness of each child. As a result, Think Small has adopted a Proxy Indicator, while working with partners and utilizing its sphere of influence, to work towards requiring the state to collect reliable data on kindergarten readiness for each child.





Proxy Population Level Indicator

As Think Small scanned the available data to support the Proxy Population Level Indicator, it determined that in fact there needs to be two in order to fully articulate the landscape of what is currently happening and set the stage for ongoing efforts.

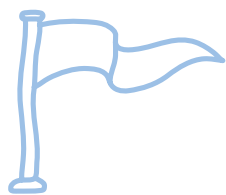
These indicators are:

- Number and percentage of children participating in quality early care and education programs in the seven-county metro.
- Number and percentage of quality early care and education programs in the seven-county metro.

Think Small's efforts will be focused on the seven-county metro area. However, given the scale of early childhood activity in the seven-county metro area in comparison to the entire state, as well as Think Small's influence on statewide and national work, we believe that what we do in this targeted area will have an influence in Minnesota and beyond.

In addition to establishing our Population Level Result, Population Level Indicator and Proxy Population Level Indicators, Think Small has established a statement around dosage:

Think Small believes every child will be ready for kindergarten if provided with an adequate amount of early childhood education based on his/ her needs.



In closing, by utilizing the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework with our partners, Think Small's work will be more focused and more efficient towards its goals of closing Minnesota's opportunity gap. By closing this gap, we will have eliminated the state's achievement gap by **placing a priority on children and their families** through access to quality early childhood care and education.