

Early care and education in Minnesota

Asset review and status report

N O V E M B E R 2 0 0 8

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Introduction

Early childhood business plan goals and partners

The goals of the early childhood business plan are to explain, inform, and guide public and private stakeholders and policymakers and the general public about the investments and activities required for all children to have opportunities for school success. The business plan has two parts, an asset review and an action plan.

The funding organizations include The McKnight Foundation, The Minneapolis Foundation, Bush Foundation, Blandin Foundation, Sheltering Arms Foundation, Grotto Foundation, Social Venture Partners, and Greater Twin Cities United Way. The consulting team includes Becker Consulting (Stacy Becker), Millenium Consulting (Betty Emarita and Yvonne Cheek) and Wilder Research (Richard Chase).

Wilder Research is responsible for the asset review and will provide input and comments on the action plan drafted by Becker Consulting.

Purposes of asset review

The asset review provides an overarching lay of the early care and education landscape, summarizing and building on the numerous studies, assessments, and reports that have been developed since 2000 related to policies and financing of early care and education and related areas for children, from the prenatal stage to grade three. It describes the progress of systems-building work underway in Minnesota and the opportunities and challenges to building an early childhood system and to achieving better outcomes for children. It also provides an inventory of partnerships, organizations, and programs in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors active in early care and education.

As part of the asset review, Wilder Research also conducted personal interviews and facilitated group discussions throughout Minnesota that provided an opportunity for a broad range of stakeholders to exchange ideas and provide input and qualitative information to refine and inform the asset review and the development of the action plan.

Summary and recommendations

This summary describes the current status of Minnesota's early childhood care and education system. It is based on a review of several dozen plans and reports produced since 2000, and group discussions and interviews around the state with about 175 early childhood stakeholders. It also provides recommendations for how to improve upon assets and implement new approaches and assumptions that move early childhood care and education beyond “business as usual.”

A similar status report written in 2003 by Wilder Research for the Minnesota Build Initiative, identified key gaps in Minnesota’s early childhood care and education system. It found no consensus on a vision for an early care and education system, no cost or funding analyses, few clearly identified champions, no shared quality measure, and no ongoing statewide monitoring system to assess kindergarten readiness.

Now Minnesota has more building blocks of an early care and education system. Much of the progress has been made through the concerted efforts of advocates based on plans developed by Ready 4 K in conjunction with the Build Initiative and through an incremental, piecemeal approach by various early childhood stakeholders; but many gaps and challenges remain.

Strengths and successes

Vision

- Stakeholders in the discussions and interviews commonly expressed a broad and comprehensive vision of “school readiness” in which all children have opportunities to develop and achieve their full potential.
- The vision encompasses the whole child within local and cultural contexts of diverse families and communities.
- School readiness is perceived as a developmental process that begins prenatally, extends through early elementary school and includes a range of cognitive, language, and social skills as well as physical health, self-confidence, and curiosity for learning. Supportive and supported families in empowered communities are also part of the vision.
- An observational (authentic) developmental assessment at kindergarten does not represent the whole vision of school readiness, but is an acceptable way to measure and assess the extent to which school readiness is being achieved.

- Two-way communication, where information and ideas flow openly between state and local early childhood stakeholders, is also central to the vision.

Awareness and allies

- Awareness about the importance of cognitive and social/emotional early learning for a good start in school and in life and for a strong future workforce is fairly widespread and growing among the general public and community leaders – business, cultural and tribal, foundation, state and local government.
- Legislative awareness has grown, leading to a bi-partisan Early Childhood Legislative Caucus with nearly 150 members. Working with Louise Stoney, an early childhood financing consultant, Caucus leaders have coalesced around establishing a quality rating system in Minnesota as the basis for funding early care and education. Speaker of the House Margaret Anderson Kelliher has called for a legislative summit on early education for January 28, 2009, indicating that early childhood education is one of her top priorities.
- In 2003, Minnesota had no clear champions for early care and education. Since then, most of the action has been in the private sector – Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs), Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF), The McKnight Foundation, and corporate funding inspired by Minneapolis Federal Reserve economists Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald.

Working partnerships

- The six MIFs, through the joint Early Childhood Initiative, have established 80 local early childhood initiatives with funding from The McKnight Foundation. MIF initiatives have formed coalitions in over 165 greater Minnesota communities that have implemented more than 400 projects, programs, and activities centered on five key components of a nurturing community – strong families, engaged community members, effective and coordinated early care and education, early learning opportunities, and ready schools.
- Ready 4 K and Minnesota Businesses for Early Learning (MnBEL) raised awareness and support in the business community that led to the start up of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF).
- A group of about 20 funders actively participate in the Minnesota Early Childhood Funders Network, working together to communicate key early childhood policy messages and to increase opportunities for young children and their families.

- The Minnesota Department of Human Service’s Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education initiative to reduce child abuse and neglect is working with the Minnesota Build Initiative and the Minnesota Department of Health to infuse a focus on family assets and protective factors throughout Minnesota’s early childhood work. This initiative has brought child welfare into early childhood system building.
- At the local level, initiatives are underway to transform the mental health system for families with young children, such as Foundations for Success in Ramsey County and the Minnesota Thrive Initiative in six Minnesota Initiative Foundation communities in greater Minnesota. The Metro Alliance for Healthy Families is replicating the Dakota Healthy Families targeted home visiting model for first-time mothers to prevent child maltreatment and developmental problems and is promoting the development of a statewide coalition.

Research and innovation

- The Early Childhood Research Collaborative (ECRC) has held two national conferences co-hosted by Art Rolnick, Minneapolis Federal Reserve, and Arthur Reynolds, University of Minnesota professor of child development. The ECRC plus MELF, the Itasca Project, and Growth and Justice are contributing to a growing body of work regarding cost effective strategies for achieving school readiness.
- Stakeholders have general agreement on the economic value of early learning and on early care and education effectiveness factors – safe settings, small groups, warm and responsive adult-child interactions, language-rich environments, developmentally appropriate “curriculum,” and qualified staff.
- MELF is testing cost-effective strategies for improving school readiness, including pilots of Parent Aware (a quality rating and improvement system for early childhood programs and an information source for consumers) and the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program (the Rolnick and Grunewald model). Among the accomplishments of MELF that provide a foundation for further research and accountability mechanisms include: a taxonomy of effective early childhood programs; a conceptual framework or logic model for MELF underlying all of its projects; and a measurement model with recommended measures of child development.
- Innovations in the past year include: legislation to support family, friend, and neighbor care (the first state to do so); early childhood screening by age 3; home visiting to reach families most at risk for not having their young children ready for kindergarten, and Pre-K.

- Minnesota Reading Corps is a statewide public-private collaborative program that uses AmeriCorps members and other tutors to provide one-on-one literacy education for about 9,000 disadvantaged children age 3 to grade 3 who need extra support in reading.
- Invest Early is a comprehensive early childhood collaborative for low-income and at-risk children and their families in Itasca County, Minnesota, that provides Head Start quality classrooms for more than 250 3-and 4-year olds using an innovative blending of public funding streams bolstered with foundation dollars. Partners include the Blandin Foundation, Head Start, and the four school districts in the county.
- A 2004 survey by Wilder Research found that parents most commonly consider location, quality, and cost when choosing child care. Parents choose family, friend, and neighbor care because they prefer care by someone they know and therefore trust, and because they like the flexibility and more individualized attention their children receive. The research also found parents choose center-based care for the structure, activities, and the special training of the caregiver. Child care choices have eroded in the past five years, affecting nearly 40 percent of parents with low incomes, parents of color, those with a child who has a special need, and those whose primary language is not English.

Quality improvement and accountability

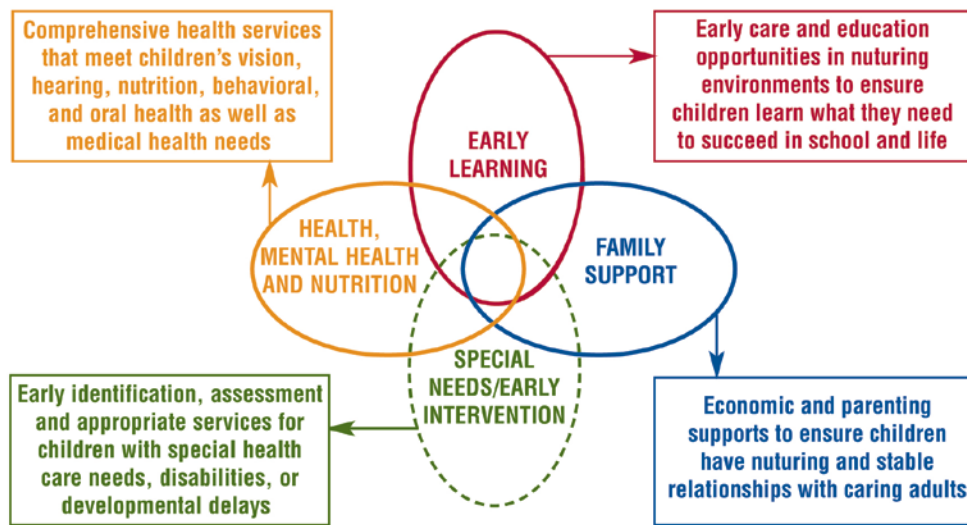
- The Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services have developed standards – early childhood indicators of progress for children and core competencies for early childhood professionals. The legislature has appropriated funding to improve early care and education quality through an improved statewide professional development system and professional development activities such as T.E.A.C.H., an educational scholarship for people working in child care centers and licensed family child care homes.
- The Minnesota Department of Education, MELF, and several initiatives are promoting increased use of age appropriate developmental assessment tools, including assessments for children’s mental health (ASQ-SE) and kindergarten readiness (MDE’s Work Sampling Checklist).

System-building

- An early care and education framework formulate how early learning intersects with physical and mental health, family support, and special needs, brought to Minnesota through the national Build Initiative (Early Childhood Systems Working Group), resonates with most stakeholders. In this regard, the “system” consists of interrelated components working in concert to achieve a common goal. Rather than being governed under a single authority, the components remain independent and may have other goals as well as the shared one.

State early childhood system model

FAMILIES SUPPORTED AND CHILDREN THRIVING, HEALTHY, AND READY FOR SCHOOL
IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY



National Early Childhood Systems Working Groups

- Ready 4 K’s Build Initiative and the Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (MECCS) grant through the Department of Health have aligned their system-building work and collaborated on compiling indicators and strategies for an early childhood system in the report, *Early Childhood Minnesota* (Wilder Research, 2008).
- The new State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care created by the Governor is interested in integrating findings of this Asset Review in their planning and decision-making.

Gaps and challenges

Goals

- Stakeholders and plans have expressed several early childhood goals – more money for programs, more quality in programs, more access to high-quality experiences for young children and families, parent empowerment, and more school readiness to close the achievement gap and to ensure a qualified future workforce. The goals are interrelated, but emphasize different strategies and lead to some confusion by legislators and other decision-makers about purpose and focus.
- Child care is a non-profit and for-profit business, an educational opportunity for children to learn and interact with peers, a caretaking service for working parents, and, a welfare program for low-income families seeking payment assistance. These different facets of child care continue to pose challenges to a unified purpose.

Governance and leadership

- Early care and education in Minnesota has governance, but the parts are structurally separated (siloed) in legislative committees (Early Childhood Learning Finance Division in the House and E-12 in the Senate) and in the state departments of education, health, and human services.
- Although awareness about early childhood issues is high, that has not translated to being a high priority. In nearly every group discussion, participants described early childhood as a low priority – in the Tribes; in the state departments of education, health, and human services; in school districts, and in the legislature. They also described a concentration of power in leadership of the House, and Senate along with the Governor and a lack of counter-balancing leadership for early childhood outside of government, *leaving most feeling left out of decision-making*.
- Local communities are looking for flexibility and two-way communication, not more bureaucracy. Closing the leadership gap may require championing different ways of doing business and spending than advocates for current programs may want.

Financing at scale

- Total public spending in 2008 for early care and education was nearly \$399 million, an increase of about 6 percent since 2002 in real dollars, but about a 13 percent decrease in adjusted dollars according to the consumer price index.

- As a consequence of the governance structure, financing for education and child care is fragmented and competitive. In addition, numerous partnerships are running independent pilots that provide and are testing fresh approaches, but none are large enough to supply enough developmentally and culturally appropriate high-quality early care and education.
- While the Build Initiative and MECCS have articulated an early childhood systems framework for thinking about how early care and education intersects with physical and mental health, family support, and special needs, much work remains to increase and strengthen the connections at the state and local levels.
- An emerging challenge centers on legislative interest in bringing to scale a useful and appropriate early care and education quality rating system (through the guidance of early care and education financing consultant Louise Stoney) while MELF is still implementing and evaluating a rating system in selected Twin Cities and rural communities.
- Build and MECCS have defined what data are needed to collect for indicators of a comprehensive, accessible early childhood system with sufficient quality to produce child and family health and well-being. However, the three state departments that are planning and funding early childhood services have no shared data or information systems, and many indicators of early childhood health and well-being have no data sources.

Inclusion and equity

- Voices of rural, cultural, tribal, and immigrant communities are lacking in the early childhood system-building work. Expanding stakeholder engagement to ensure a more culturally diverse and competent early childhood system is a central challenge to early childhood system building.
- While Minnesota has a good start on establishing early learning standards, quality ratings for programs, and child development assessments, a remaining challenge is to ensure that definitions and measures suit all families and providers; have community acceptance; and integrate the values, priorities, and best practices of diverse cultural and ethnic communities.
- Stakeholders in the discussions and interviews raised concerns that quality ratings and child assessments are misused when they are considered as end points rather than as tools for instruction and continuous improvement.

- The professional development system, now undergoing improvements, must address a lack of access in rural communities and a lack of qualified trainers in rural and cultural communities.
- Transportation is a barrier to participating in early learning opportunities for rural and inner-city children. It is also becoming a barrier in the suburbs as more low-income families move there.
- Low-income working families with incomes between 185 percent and 200 percent of poverty are not eligible for public health insurance or child care subsidies. For families with incomes below 185 percent of poverty, small improvements in incomes result in loss of coverage and disrupt continuity of health care and child care. Continuous eligibility for 12 months before re-determination of eligibility would improve this access problem.

Recommendations

These recommendations aim to improve upon the assets and to fill gaps with new approaches and new assumptions that go beyond business as usual.

1. Support multiple paths to a common goal to achieve the common good.
2. Establish a public/private fund for community scholarships.
3. Assert a call to action to advance early care and education.

1. Support multiple paths to a common goal to achieve the common good

In our conversations around the state, stakeholders agreed that more school readiness is a central policy goal, as long as it is viewed and pursued broadly and comprehensively. Minnesota has the opportunity to construct a fair and equitable early care and education system free of disparities in delivery and results – to prevent the achievement gap by closing the equity gap. The efforts of government, community coalitions, and public/private partnerships must ensure that every step of the way respects and is responsive to all families and communities, which are the building blocks of school readiness, being mindful that the context varies by locale and culture. Whatever we do has to make sense in rural Minnesota and in tribal and cultural communities. Rural and cultural differences require differing approaches and arrays of resources to reach the common goal. Equity and inclusion must be integral to our actions and to how we define and measure access, engagement, quality, and outcomes.

In practical terms, this means:

- Make young children and early learning community priorities and a collective responsibility.
- Invest in ways that allow maximum flexibility and innovation at the local level.
- Support local partnerships and don't saddle them with new requirements or impose top-down solutions.
- Assist community-based and cultural-specific early care and education programs and providers to meet quality standards as well as adjust standards to value cultural programs so that families in cultural communities have an authentic choice of which programs to use, building on the work of the Early Childhood Resource and Training Center (ECRTC), and the Minnesota Tribal Early Childhood Council (MnTRECC).
- Respond holistically to needs of children, with the understanding that child development is a process, not an academic event that takes place at kindergarten entry.
- Ensure early learning standards, quality rating systems (Parent Aware), and child development assessments are inclusive and culturally appropriate, and equip licensed family providers and center-based programs in cultural and rural communities to meet and use them.
- Focus attention and concern towards the kindergarten children assessed as “not yet” developmentally ready more than on those “in process” or inconsistently demonstrating proficiency.
- Support family-centric approaches that address needs of parents and children at the same time, such as parental depression and child development
- Recognize the extent that family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) caregivers have a role in early childhood development and maximize the early learning that takes place in FFN homes on a voluntary, not a regulatory, basis. To achieve educational equity and expansion of early learning opportunities throughout Minnesota for low-income children, and to achieve more school readiness, FFN care must be a core part of the solution.

2. Establish a public/private fund for community scholarships

Faced with an insufficient supply of high-quality developmentally and culturally appropriate early care and education and related services, Minnesota must muster the courage, imagination, and openness to spend what we have differently. There needs to be a coordinated system of funding that goes beyond solely constructing and financing a system of programs. Existing programs and public funding streams could be extended and better targeted in locally appropriate ways by establishing a pool of public/private funds for community scholarships. This is critical given the grim times ahead for any new government spending plans.

Ready 4 K has a proposal to finance early care and education in Minnesota by creating a new quality early learning fund. This fund would pool new state dollars to increase quality, support parents, and increase access through more portable resources for parents (such as child care subsidies, scholarships, and tax credits). It would direct financing to early education and parent support programs, with funding tied to quality standards. This recommendation adds private dollars to the funding pool and a third beneficiary of resources – communities.

Community scholarships would allow maximum flexibility and community choice, with no prescribed ways to remove barriers or to improve access to and increase supply of worthwhile, effective early learning opportunities. Communities would have to provide some level of matching funds, to agree to follow program quality standards, and to be accountable for school readiness outcomes. They would also have to employ a transparent, authentic, and inclusive decision-making process for using the community scholarships that builds on root strengths and eliminates root causes of the readiness and achievement gaps.

In the spirit of collective responsibility, maximizing existing resources and opportunities, these community scholarships could:

- Support and strengthen service connections and collaborative efforts to achieve school readiness that take place now out of necessity and naturally based on relationships among programs and agencies in rural and cultural communities.
- Help to level the playing field so that communities that are affected by policies and programs also have a part in developing them.
- Give isolated, disadvantaged families access to high-quality early learning experiences and family supports.

- Leverage other funding to serve more infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in formal programs, such as Invest Early is doing with the Blandin Foundation investment.
- Support family resource centers and support networks, mutual assistance associations for immigrants and ethnic communities, and other intermediaries with connections to underserved children and families.
- Reduce waiting lists to serve more families with infants and toddlers in Head Start programs, expand coverage for low-income children not otherwise eligible, and increase access to proven family literacy, parenting, and mentoring programs.
- Provide transportation services for rural, suburban, and urban children to attend early learning opportunities.
- Strengthen connections between early care and education and primary health care providers to improve early screening and access to needed services.
- Strengthen community connections and ease transitions between early care and education and early elementary education in locally and culturally appropriate ways.

3. Assert a call to action to advance early care and education

First, to make early childhood a priority, early childhood stakeholders must be assertive to compete with other interest groups at the legislature and in local communities in order to get a bigger piece of the pie. Once that is achieved, then the stakeholders should share the slice – compete, then cooperate.

Many early childhood stakeholders around the state are looking to foundations to serve by example and as role models for how to exert competitive leadership and then how to cooperate to achieve the common goal of more school readiness. The leverage points include:

- At the foundation board level, speak with a unified voice across foundations at the legislature and with the governor on ways to increase access to quality early learning opportunities for low-income children and on other agreed upon strategies, moving from being advocates to leaders.
- Convene stakeholders (local and state, public and private), to take a stand, issuing a call to action on an early childhood platform.
- In partnership with affected communities, set and share common expectations across foundations for results, measures of effectiveness, and intermediate markers of progress and success.

- Clarify roles and identify additional resources (public, private, philanthropic) that could bring financing to scale, formalizing the state's financial contribution through legislation and foundations' contributions through memorandum of understanding.

Early care and education size and scope

Children age 5 and younger in Minnesota

Approximately 415,183 young children age 5 and younger reside in Minnesota in 303,883 families, representing 8 percent of the total population (American Community Survey, 2006).

- 15 percent live in households with incomes at or below poverty; 18 percent in households at 101 to 200 percent of poverty; and 67 percent in households above 200 percent of poverty.
- 78 percent are white, 9 percent African or African American, 5 percent two or more racial groups, 4 percent Asian, 1 percent American Indian, and 3 percent some other group; 9 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino.
- Young children are more diverse and more likely to be in low-income households than Minnesotans generally (89% white and 8% in poverty).

Number of early care and education programs and providers

Minnesota has a mix of regulated and unregulated programs and providers that provide early care and education. Based on data from the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network and the Minnesota Department of Education. Minnesota has:

- About 10,491 licensed family child care homes
- 829 licensed child care centers
- 519 licensed preschools
- 338 School Readiness programs (primarily serving children identified through Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening)
- 36 Head Start programs
- About 150,000 family, friend, and neighbor (informal) caregivers (Chase et al, 2006)

Enrollment in quality early childhood programs

Child care licensing supports a basic level of quality. Minnesota's quality rating system, Parent Aware, lists sites rated higher for quality, but the system is not yet available on a statewide level. (See <http://www.parentawareratings.org/> for more information.)

Therefore, determining higher levels of quality statewide relies on information about the educational attainment of providers, the accreditation status of centers, and direct observation. Early Head Start and Head Start Programs meeting performance standards are considered high quality early care and education, enhancing family strengths and positively affecting a child's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development.

- About 70,000 infants and toddlers are enrolled in licensed child care; 15 percent of these are enrolled in a place with an indicator of quality. Another 2,644 children age 2 and younger are served by Early Head Start.
- About 157,000 preschoolers are enrolled in licensed child care or Head Start (about 15,206 are in Head Start); 22 percent are enrolled in a place with an indicator of quality.
- About 10,000 children age 3 to 5 are served by the Minnesota Department of Education School Readiness program.
- In 2008, according to data from the Minnesota Head Start Association, only about a third of income-eligible children were served by Head Start and Early Head Start.

Policy and systems-building work currently underway in Minnesota

Build Initiative

The early care and education policy and systems-building work, and efforts to overcome system barriers, currently underway and proposed in Minnesota primarily involve the Minnesota Build Initiative and its partners.

In Minnesota, Ready 4 K, a nonprofit advocacy organization, has led the work of Build since 2002 and carries it out with a host of partners, including key state department staff, foundation and business leaders, and early childhood advocates. Lists of individuals and organizations involved in various components that make up an early care and education system are in the Appendix. Policy work has focused on four key principles: support parents, increase quality, improve access, and increase accountability for results. The systems work has focused primarily on improving the school readiness of Minnesota's children through implementing an early childhood system that: a) provides an array of early learning supports and services to children and families, and b) supports an infrastructure to ensure that services be of high quality, accessible and affordable.

For the past five years, Minnesota Build has been an active participant at the national level in a learning community established by the national Build Initiative, which has enabled Minnesota to adapt early childhood system-building strategies being tried in six other Build states, such as strategies to establish quality rating systems and to support family, friend, and neighbor caregivers. At present, strategies to achieve racial/ethnic, cultural, and language equity in early childhood systems is a top priority of the national Build Initiative. In addition to developing cognitive and social/emotional skills, children are learning how they fit into the world, how different children are treated, what behaviors are valued at home and expected at school, and how to handle prejudicial attitudes. An overview of the national Build's work on diversity and equity, *Building Early Childhood Systems in a Multi-ethnic Society*, identifies five gaps for children related to culture and language: kindergarten readiness, participation in formal services, cultural awareness and recognition, workforce diversity, and stakeholder planning and decision-making.

In addition, Minnesota has benefited from Build's strategic relationships and collaborations with other early childhood systems-building initiatives, including the School Readiness Indicators Project and its State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, Smart Start and its National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC),

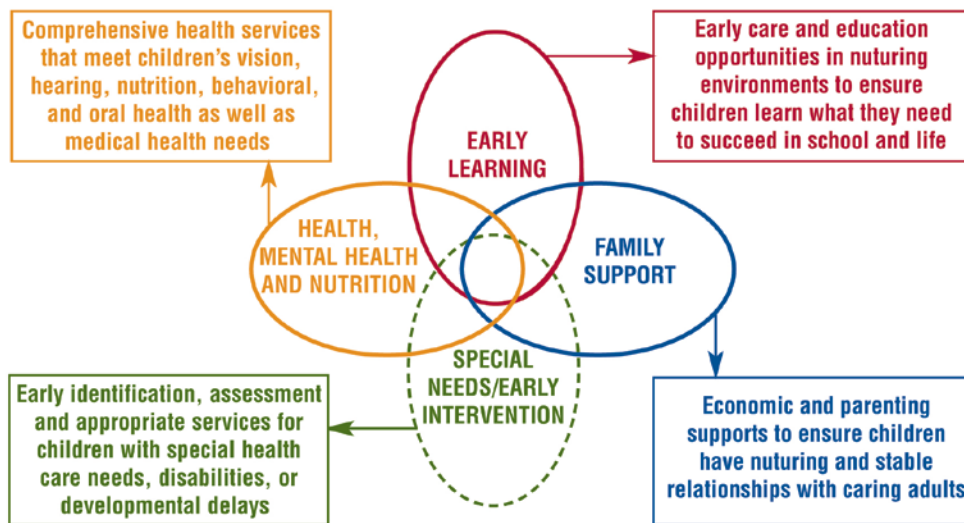
and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative and its Project Thrive Project administered through the National Center for Children in Poverty.

Outcomes and indicators framework

Minnesota Build is in the process of broadening the early childhood focus beyond early care and education. It has convened and engaged a broad group of stakeholders in developing a common outcomes framework with indicators of child and family health and well-being and indicators of system access and quality across health, early learning, family support, and special needs. This framework being used in Minnesota systems-building in conjunction with the Minnesota Comprehensive Early Childhood Systems project in the Minnesota Department of Health, was adapted from the framework developed by Build and the Early Childhood Systems Working Group. That group consists of most of the key organizations which have been working with states to build early childhood systems – the Alliance for Early Childhood; the Build Initiative; the Center for Law and Social Policy; the Children’s Project; the Council of Chief State School Officers; the National Association for the Education of Young Children; the National Center for Children in Poverty/Project Thrive; the National Child Care Resource and Information Center; the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices; the National Conference of State Legislatures; the Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center; the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network; United Way of America; and Zero to Three.

1. State early childhood system model

FAMILIES SUPPORTED AND CHILDREN THRIVING, HEALTHY, AND READY FOR SCHOOL IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY



National Early Childhood Systems Working Groups

Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (MECCS)

MECCS, supported by the Maternal Child Health Bureau since 2003, aims to promote the health and well-being of children from ages 0 to 5 by planning and developing an early childhood service system focused on access to comprehensive health services and medical homes; social-emotional development and mental health of young children; early care and education; parenting education; and family support. Key partners include Head Start; Early Childhood Screening; Children's Trust Fund; Children's Mental Health; Child Care; Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) services; Maternal Child Health; Children with Special Health Needs; and Family Home Visiting.

MECCS staff, located in the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), worked independently of Build for several years on improving Minnesota's early childhood screening efforts. During the past year, through the leadership of Dr. Penny Hatcher, MECCS has worked with Minnesota Build to align their systems work, with MECCS adopting Build's early childhood development system model as part of their next MECCS grant. Penny Hatcher serves on the Build advisory committee, the outcomes and indicators workgroup, and the Build state team; and MECCS helped fund the Build outcomes and indicators report.

Minnesota Strengthening Families

Minnesota Strengthening Families is a partnership of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services, the Minnesota Build Initiative, and MECCS that is currently developing a plan to integrate the Strengthening Families through early care and education evidenced-based protective factors – parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and children's social and emotional development – into Minnesota's early childhood system-building work. These factors have been used since 2001 in early care and education and child welfare programs as a new approach to prevent child abuse and neglect and to promote healthy child development.

In 2008, joining 24 other states, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) became an affiliate member of the Strengthening Families National Network in 2008. At about the same time, the Minnesota Build Initiative was one of four states to receive technical assistance to integrate Strengthening Families principles into Minnesota's early childhood system-building work.

The Strengthening Families approach treats people so they are empowered, not diminished, by the help they receive. A work group in Minnesota is adding a sixth protective factor – culture.

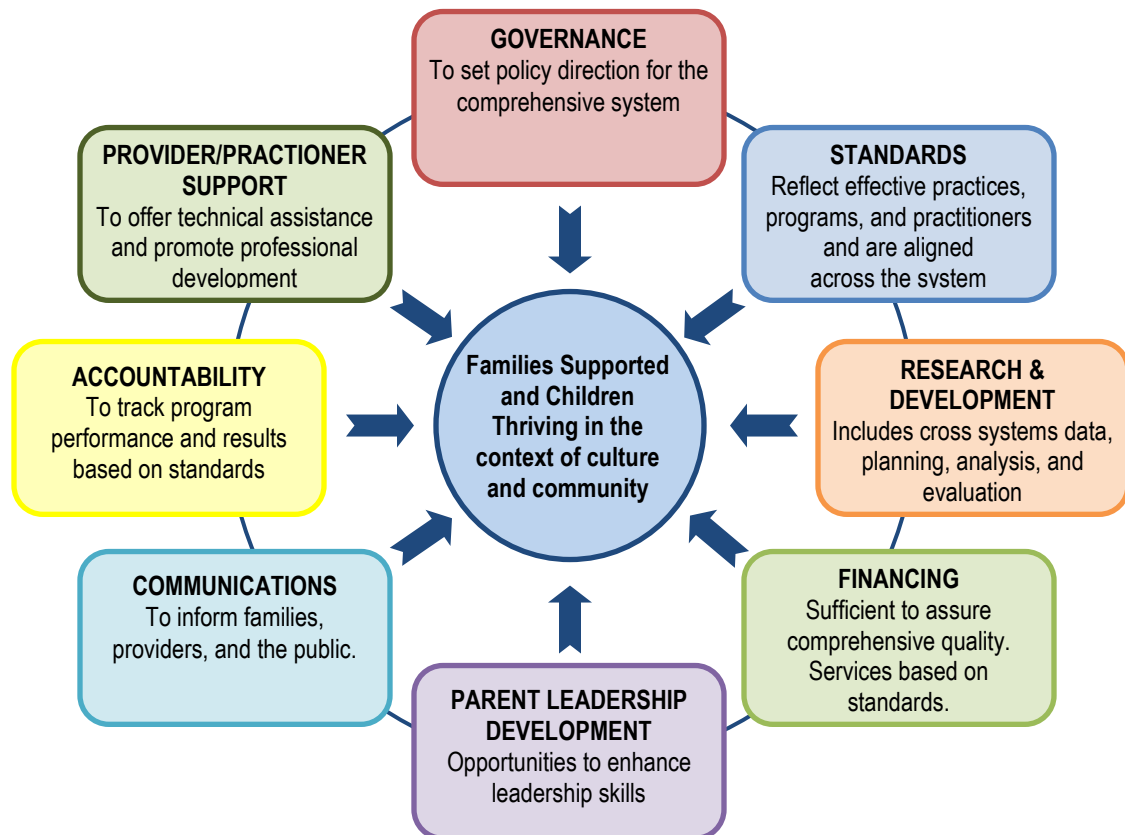
Infants and toddlers

Beginning in 2006, the Build Initiative and Zero to Three (the National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families) sponsored the initial planning and piloting in Minnesota for babies and toddlers system building work. MECCS, along with Minnesota Build, recently completed a revised statewide needs assessment for children 0-3. The data will be used to help set priorities for system and policy initiatives. In addition, working with the Bush Foundation, Build helped plan and participated in a 2008 statewide cross-sector training on infant/toddler development and implications for state systems.

Core components of an early childhood system

The core components provide the infrastructure, or supports, that ensure the governance, financing, quality, and availability of services for children and families. This section describes the status of each component in Minnesota.

2. Core components of an early childhood system



Adapted from Early Childhood Systems Working Group, 5/13/08

Research and Development

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF)

MELF was established as a vehicle for research and development on how to deliver high-quality early care and education and to achieve the best return on the public and private investment in early childhood education. During its first year, the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) raised almost \$17 million in private dollars to implement and test strategies to promote school readiness in children from low income families or families facing other challenges. By the time the MELF initiative ends in 2011, MELF will have invested approximately \$4.7 million to conduct research and evaluation to better understand what works best for which children and most cost-effectively.

Wilder Research prepared a report describing the early learning conditions in the MELF pilot communities prior to testing the school readiness strategies.

Based on surveys with representative samples of parents and providers conducted in 2007, the study found that while many low-income families in MELF pilot areas have stable and enriching homes, where the parents provide their children ample early learning opportunities and are hopeful about their future, too many low-income parents, along with the early learning providers and agencies aiming to help them, face daunting challenges and potential barriers for achieving school readiness. The problems include high rates of poverty, low rates of parental educational attainment, inadequate emotional and social support, English literacy issues for the many immigrant and refugee families, limited access to organized activities for children, and unsafe neighborhoods. Racial and ethnic disparities also figure into this mix of problems. Accordingly, to resolve these problems and to advance the health and development of all children require tailored, comprehensive, culture-specific approaches to strengthening families and communities (Chase, 2008).

MELF produced annual reports in 2007 and 2008 that provide an overview of the implementation status and goals of its four comprehensive scalable community pilot projects and 10 innovation grants in selected community organizations using promising strategies that have not yet been well-researched and/or target vulnerable families. The two largest and intertwined projects underway are the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program and Parent Aware, the quality rating system.

- The Scholarship Program being piloted in St. Paul's North End and Frogtown neighborhoods is the first test of the market-driven model based on the research and advocacy of Rolnick and Grunewald of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve. The evaluation being conducted by SRI International assessing the extent of gains in learning readiness when low-income parents, with the support of parenting mentors,

are provided up to \$13,000 a year per child to purchase consistent, high-quality care for their 3 and 4-year olds. The evaluation is also examining how the child care and early education market responds when parents are empowered with information and purchasing power to choose high-quality programs for their young children.

A September 2008 early implementation evaluation by SRI International found that 42 children were enrolled in programs using scholarships as of July, with 152 eligible to enroll now, and another 188 children have met eligibility requirements for future enrollment.

- Parent Aware allows parents to access information online about the quality of early care and education programs and providers based on objective ratings. Parent Aware is being tested in all four MELF comprehensive scalable community sites – Saint Paul’s North End and Frogtown neighborhoods (Planning Districts 6 &7), in North Minneapolis the Five Hundred Under 5 area, in Wayzata/Plymouth’s Caring for Kids Initiative area, and Blue Earth and Nicollet counties. About 200 early childhood providers are participating in the system so far, and an additional 50 or so providers are receiving technical assistance to improve aspects of their ratings.

Key partners implementing Parent Aware are the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R), the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and the Assessment and Training Center at the Center for Early Education and Development. Child Trends Inc. is conducting the evaluation of the rating system, which specifically addresses learning readiness progress.

Researchers from the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota are working with MELF to provide technical assistance to grantees for evaluation, and coordinating evaluation of all MELF funded initiatives. The evaluation process was fully developed and launched in 2007.

Among the accomplishments of MELF that provide a foundation for further research and accountability mechanisms include: 1) a taxonomy of effective early childhood programs, 2) a conceptual framework or logic model for MELF underlying all of its projects, and 3) a measurement model with recommended measures of child development.

Service delivery features that underlie effective early childhood programs identified by CEED for MELF are timing, duration, intensity, quality, ratios, fidelity, curriculum, and supervision. The key service model features are comprehensiveness, targeted at high-risk, compensatory, cultural continuity, service coordination, and professional development.

Among the investment strategies promoted by MELF are to keep the focus on outcomes related to school readiness; invest where most needed, in children at risk; empower parents; and optimize cost-effectiveness by investing in lower-cost programs with large, broad returns.

For MELF, the over-arching research questions are: 1) which approaches prepare children for school; 2) which initiatives deliver resources efficiently; 3) which strategies empower families; 4) which programs succeeded; 5) which programs are cost-effective; 6) which initiatives served community needs; and 7) what information helps us improve early learning outcomes.

The MELF Research Consortium is a group of research organizations working collaboratively to evaluate MELF-funded strategies and to share results to inform decisions at the policy, community, and program level. The consortium includes The Center for Early Education – CEED – at the University of Minnesota, Child Trends, SRI International and Wilder Research.

Early Childhood Minnesota

Wilder Research has prepared a report, *Early Childhood Minnesota*, compiling the indicators of child and family health and well-being and of system access and quality identified by the Build outcomes and indicators workgroup. The report also highlights proven strategies that can achieve the outcomes. The report, jointly funded by Build and MECCS, is available at www.wilderresearch.org.

Invest Early

Invest Early is a comprehensive early childhood collaborative for low-income and at-risk children and their families in Itasca County, Minnesota. Partners include the Blandin Foundation, Head Start, and the four public school districts in the county.

Wilder Research, in conjunction with the Invest Early leadership team and staff, is conducting a longitudinal and cost-benefit evaluation, documenting and assessing implementation of Invest Early and outcomes for the service system, families, and children. In the short term, Invest Early is assessing to what extent children's school readiness improves by improving the system of early childhood screening, care, and education; by strengthening and empowering families, and by promoting healthy child development. Invest Early is also assessing to what extent these improvements will ultimately save taxpayers' money by reducing the number of children needing special education services, by cutting the number of children repeating kindergarten or first grade, and by reducing out-of-home placements for children.

The big returns on investment are expected to accrue as Invest Early children become teenagers and adults and, relative to a comparison group of their peers who did not participate in Invest Early programs, achieve higher graduation rates and employment earnings, have better mental and chemical health, and have lower rates of juvenile delinquency, crime, and imprisonment.

In year two, Invest Early children with 2 years of the program narrowed the proficiency gap relative to their higher-income peers.

Family home visiting

Legislation in 2007 for Minnesota's Family Home Visiting program put the focus on school readiness and collaboration at the local level through Community Health Boards and Tribes. The legislation requires comprehensive evaluations both at the state level and at the local levels. The Minnesota Department of Health is currently developing an evaluation plan.

Governance

Minnesota has no unified early childhood governance structure. The state has several early childhood programs with separate funding streams in the Departments of Health, Education, and Human Services (listed in the Appendix). Minnesota has 343 School districts, with early education usually managed in community education. Child welfare services are state administered and operated in 87 counties.

In greater Minnesota, the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs) jointly launched the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative in 2001, now implementing strategies for transforming communities to better nurture young children in over 165 communities.

Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative

The MIFs jointly launched the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative in 2001. The MIFs are six independent, regional foundations serving the 80-county area of greater Minnesota. At present, the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative is comprised of individuals and organizations in 80 early childhood coalitions. In over 165 greater Minnesota communities, these coalitions have implemented more than 400 projects, programs, and activities that are changing and improving early learning environments, cross-agency coordination, and community-level planning to improve the well-being of young children. They are also creating culture-specific early care and education approaches and interventions that are sensitive to the needs of diverse populations.

A 2007 report by Wilder Research for the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (Chase and Moore, 2007) describes the common process used by the Initiative's early childhood coalitions use to engage community members across all sectors in ensuring all young children have access to high quality early care and education. Just as a child's brain requires nurturing and stimulation to develop to its full capacity, a community requires nurturing and stimulation to become fully engaged in improving early care and education. Like the synapses that span gaps to form vital pathways in a young child's brain, the MIFs early childhood coalition-building process helps make those critical connections within communities.

The report also describes the theories of change and research evidence for the five key components of a nurturing community – strong families, engaged community members, effective and coordinated early care and education, early learning opportunities, and ready schools.

Early Childhood Advisory Council

Identifying an acceptable governance model is a challenge that still lies ahead. The new Head Start reauthorization language requiring states to have an early learning council and the 2008 state legislation authorizing a Minnesota Early Childhood Advisory Council present an opportunity for developing a broad consensus for an early childhood governance structure. The Minnesota Department of Education is currently coordinating a planning process to determine the make-up and responsibilities of the council.

Financing

Federal funding streams

Most of the public financing in early care and education is for programs. Federal funding is channeled through state education agencies and sometimes to local education agencies. Programs that are financed through this process include: 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Even Start Formula Grants, Social Services Block Grant, Special Education Grants for Infants and Families, Special Education Preschool Grants, and Part C Interagency Early Intervention. Most of these programs are allocated set amounts of money based on the number of children fitting applicable age or need criteria in the area's population.

Programs also receive federal funds by directly applying for competitive federal grants. The Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program and Early Reading First Program are examples of directly funded programs. Head Start is a hybrid of these two types of funding. Head Start grantees receive the majority of their funds through

competitive grants from the US Department of Health and Human Services. However, the state and local communities must provide about 20 percent of the funding for Head Start.

State funding streams

The legislature allocates a specific dollar amount per child under four years of age in each school district to be used for Early Childhood Family Education programming. These programs may charge participant fees as well to supplement the state funding. Similarly, Minnesota School Readiness is a preschool funding stream in which school districts receive funds from the Minnesota Department of Education based on the number of 4 year olds and the proportion of free lunches received in the district. School districts directly administer mandated Health and Developmental Screening and then are reimbursed by the state based on the number of children screened. Reimbursements are higher for 3 year old screenings as an incentive to screen earlier.

Legislation in 2007 provided \$40 million in new dollars over the biennium. For perspective, the Ready 4 K policy agenda was asking for \$300 million for the biennium.

The Minnesota legislature established Pre-Kindergarten Allowances on a pilot basis to promote school readiness for low-income 3 and 4 year olds who may be unprepared for kindergarten entrance, providing \$6 million in funding through the Minnesota Department of Human Services to help parents pay for high-quality child care and education programs. Families must live in one of the four MELF comprehensive scalable community project areas – North Minneapolis, two neighborhoods in Saint Paul, Wayzata/Plymouth, and Blue Earth and Nicollet – where Parent Aware is being implemented to receive allowances up to \$4,000.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services also received \$5.5 million to reduce parent co-pays for child care, \$500,000 for TEACH scholarships, and \$1 million for professional development and child care grants.

The Minnesota Department of Health received \$8.8 million for Home Visiting, targeting children at risk of starting school developmentally not ready, and \$9 million in health care for children. Minnesota Build was instrumental in ensuring the legislation to fund the intensive home-visiting/mentoring programs emphasized a multi-disciplinary approach and focused on coordination between the systems that assist families of young children such as Head Start, ECFE, Public Health nurses, county social services, and school districts' early childhood programs. Further, the current home-visiting statute was changed to include school readiness as a goal. On the other hand, due to opposition by Ed Watch, visits for all newborns were amended out of the legislation.

The Minnesota Legislature provided a total of \$13.5 million in Minnesota Department of Education funding, including \$3M in early literacy; \$5.5M to Early Childhood Family Education; \$2M to Head Start; and \$1.9M to School Readiness programs; an additional \$32.5M in new funding provided for all day kindergarten aid formula.

Child care subsidies

The Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial subsidies to help parents pay for child care so that parents are able to pursue employment or education leading to employment. The program consists of Minnesota Family Investment Program Child Care, which is available to families who are on MFIP or in the transition program. It is a voucher program in which payments are made directly to the child-care provider of the family's choosing. The payments are based on the child care provider's rate and the state cap level. Families must make co-payments based on the family income level. Counties administer the payments and determine rates of reimbursement. CCAP also funds available through the Basic Sliding Fee Child Care program, which helps families not on MFIP pay for child care or parents of children under one cover costs of a parent staying at home to care for the child. CCAP is funded through federal, state, and county money as well as co-pays by families.

About 17,464 children age 5 and younger are served in an average month. As of February 2008, 4,000 families (with children age 12 and younger) were on waiting lists for assistance.

Historically, Minnesota has been a leader in linking child care subsidies to quality care and has provided a 15 percent rate differential to programs and providers offering high quality early care and education. (Quality is determined through accreditation for center-based care and by education for family providers.) The Minnesota Department of Human Services is currently piloting a program for two years that offers incentives to programs that provide full day/full year, comprehensive services for families. School Readiness Connections offers a 25 percent subsidy rate differential on top of the 15 percent differential already offered for high quality programs that promote school readiness skills and abilities. This program is serving approximately 220 children in 14 programs.

Hennepin County has an agreement with the Minnesota Department of Education to go above their per-child maximum subsidy rate in order to fund services for children with special needs in impoverished communities. The increased subsidy only applies for nationally-accredited centers that meet the requirements set forth by Strong Beginnings. The money for this increased subsidy comes from reallocation of unused subsidies and other state and federal funds.

Public spending 2002-2008

The following figure table shows that total public spending in 2008 was nearly \$399 million, an increase of about 6 percent since 2002 in real dollars, but about a 13 percent decrease in adjusted dollars according to the consumer price index.

- The proportion of total spending coming from Federal appropriations (for the Child Care Assistance Program and Head Start) has increased from 47 percent in 2002 to 55 percent in 2008.
- The largest state expenditures for education programs are for Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and Head Start, \$21 million and \$20 million, respectively.
- 54 percent of the total spending goes for early care and education access (child care subsidies), 43 percent for early education programs, and 3 percent to improve quality.

In addition to these appropriations, in 2008, tax expenditures for Child and Dependent Care totaled \$13.9 million.

3. Minnesota public spending on early care and education, 2002-2008

Dollars in Millions	2002	2004	2006	2008
Child Care Assistance Programs (MFIP and BSF)				
Federal	\$84.66	\$72.31	\$110.45	\$116.16
State	\$114.30	\$97.65	\$57.49	\$91.51
County	\$ 2.94	\$2.95	\$2.94	\$2.94
Child Care Service Grants				
Federal	\$9.17	\$11.16	\$8.90	\$9.05
State	\$1.87	\$1.16	\$3.37	\$1.37
School Readiness	\$10.40	\$9.54	\$9.53	\$9.99
ECFE				
State	\$20.75	\$19.68	\$15.11	\$21.09
Levy	\$21.03	\$22.21	\$22.13	\$22.14
Developmental Screening	\$2.60	\$2.21	\$3.00	\$2.62
PreK Exploratory Projects*				\$2.00
Way to Grow**	\$0.48	-	-	-
Head Start				
Federal	\$72.89	\$79.48	\$82.80	\$84.75
State	\$17.96	\$16.38	\$19.10	\$20.10
Even Start	\$ 2.44	\$2.11	\$1.65	\$0.67
Preschool Special Education (IDEA Part B)	\$7.59	\$7.57	\$7.43	\$7.31
Infants and Toddlers(IDEA Part C)	\$6.71	\$6.61	\$6.83	\$7.00
TOTAL	\$375.76	\$351.01	\$350.72	\$398.69
2008 dollars (according to consumer price index)	\$456.98	\$406.54	\$380.61	\$398.69

Sources: Minnesota Department of Health; Minnesota House Research Department.

* Started in 2007.

** Program did not receive funding after 2003.

Private funding

A 2008 survey of the Minnesota Early Childhood Funders Network found that the total early childhood grantmaking reported by the 21 participating foundations in 2007 was \$23.6 million, ranging from \$10,000 to \$6.3 million, compared with \$13.9 million in 2005. In addition, corporate investments in MELF (for scholarships, other programming, and evaluation) made up a large part of the \$9.6 million in contributed support in 2007.

Private spending by families for early care and education is an estimated \$1.2 billion annually (Itasca Project).

Provider and practitioner support

Family, friends, and neighbors child care

Minnesota has been a national leader in viewing family, friends, and neighbors informal child care (FFN) as an integral part of the overall early childhood system. Since 2004, DHS has funded FFN studies, outreach and support services, culminating in landmark legislation in 2007 when the Minnesota legislature appropriated to the Minnesota Department of Human Services \$750,000 for a Family, Friend and Neighbor grant program based on legislation sponsored by Ready 4 K.

The new grant program provides one-time funding for quality enhancements for FFN caregivers. The money is being used to fund six projects. Local partnerships, a priority of the grant, include Indian tribes, libraries, ECFE programs and school districts, a museum, organizations serving immigrant and refugee families, and other non-profit organizations working with FFN providers. Coordination between programs will be a priority for the grantees. In 2008, the national Build Initiative commissioned Richard Chase of Wilder Research to prepare a policy brief regarding this landmark legislation.

State Policies for Supporting Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care describes the process that led to the enactment of this legislation, involving research, advocacy, and consultation on evidenced-based practices with experts in the field. Using Minnesota as a case example, it describes how state government strategies and policies can be expanded to recognize and support family, friend, and neighbor care by applying an early learning policy framework focused on educational equity and child development. The appendix provides brief descriptions of selected efforts in other leading states that are seeking ways to recognize and support FFN care.

In the spring of 2008, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) piloted a strategic planning process regarding FFN at the invitation of Zero to Three and assisted

by the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC). The planning process involved a small group of advisors from agencies supporting or working with FFN caregivers. This group agreed upon a vision and set of goals and developed a draft describing the relationship between FFN care and key elements of the Minnesota state early childhood system and summarizing FFN activities in the state. The work of this initial advisory group concluded with a proposed set of next steps to create an action plan. DHS is in the process of seeking comments and input on the material developed by the advisory group, identifying any gaps in the description of the existing system and any additional goals, strategies, or activities needed to fully develop an action plan for Minnesota for expanding work with FFN caregivers.

Professional development system

The Minnesota Department of Human Services is working with Metro State University, the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network and others to develop a comprehensive early childhood professional development system. The Department has a **Professional Development Advisory Council** that is facilitating the development and ongoing coordination of the early childhood and youth professional development system, which includes five interconnected components:

Core Knowledge is the knowledge and skills practitioners need to work with children and youth in ways that appropriately support their development. The universal core competencies that define the core knowledge are linked to a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations or indicators of progress for children ages 0-3 and ages 3-5, spelled out in the *Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress* or ECIPs. The core competencies, moreover, are the basis for the *Minnesota Professional Development Learning Continuum Framework*, a comprehensive capability framework that identifies, approves, creates, adapts, and organizes training content that supports early care and education practitioner learning and professional development for ensuring quality. The Learning Continuum also matches the particular stage of practitioner development to its pathway of career development, which connects to the broader system Career Lattice described in the next component.

Qualifications and Credentials provide the framework, coordination, and documentation for professional development, validating and recognizing professional development acquired through education, training, and experience. The *Minnesota Career Lattice* outlines the multiple pathways for professional growth and development. The *Career Lattice* identifies different levels of experience, education, and training needed for individuals working in various roles in the field of childhood care and education – supporting multiple entry points and pathways to advance their professional development. Through coordination with higher education, the PD system defines the

criteria to articulate or translate demonstration of prior learning and informal non-credit-based training into credits awarded by a higher education institution. The PD system also provides credentials and certificates that document and validate professional achievements and qualifications of practitioners based on experience, knowledge and skills, educational attainments, and/or training accomplishments.

Funding Support for professional development includes T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps), which offers scholarships to child care providers to earn a college degree in early childhood education or child development; R.E.T.A.I.N (Retaining Early Educators Through Attaining Incentives Now), which supplements salaries through grants to child care providers who work with young children; scholarships to support Child Development Associate (CDA) credential assessment; and competitive grant funds regionally administered through the CCR&R system to support quality improvement, training, and professional development.

Some policies require that a portion of associated funds be used for professional development, though the required portion tends to be relatively small. For example, the Child Care Development Fund requires that four percent of the funds be used to increase the quality of child care through technical assistance, training, professional development, and resource and referral services. Early Reading First has a similar requirement that teachers must participate in professional development about evidence based reading programs as part of effort to increase children's language and reading skills. In addition, Title I and Minnesota School Readiness funds can now be used for professional development in early childhood education.

Quality Assurance provides an infrastructure, methods, and tools for enhancing and ensuring professional development. A wide variety of trainers, including relationship-based trainers, receive approval, support, and training to deliver training approved by DHS through a third party contract. A list of the approved trainings and centralized training calendar, with connections to higher education and other on-line databases that provide training information, are expected to be part of the *Professional Development Registry*, a web-based tool that will also track practitioner learning records and career development (anticipated launch date of July 2008). A new initiative, *Parent Aware*, Minnesota's Quality Rating System, will help parents select high-quality programs and reward early care and education programs and providers that voluntarily meet higher quality standards beyond licensing requirements. The assessment of the phased-in implementation of the PD system, a continuous quality improvement process, and the evaluation of the overall PD system measuring system changes and outcomes are also part of the quality assurance component.

Access and Outreach improves access to professional development and increases the availability of varied training opportunities and delivery methods that meet diverse needs by a) reducing barriers based on geography, language, ethnicity, disability, and other social and economic conditions; b) using varied training structures and teaching strategies in coordination across all sectors of the early childhood and school-age care field; and c) providing comprehensive and coordinated career guidance and support, coaching, and mentoring for practitioners to navigate the professional development system and to plan learning goals and objectives to improve their practice.

Training

The Minnesota CCR&R system is the main source of training in collaboration with other training entities, organizations, and higher education. On-line courses through Eager To Learn and 'Not by Chance' have been successful in increasing the number of early care and education providers who have completed early childhood degrees.

A system of articulation from community-based training and other modes of training and education to higher education is the goal. Metropolitan State University (MSU), under contract with DHS, is responsible for planning and implementing key PD system components, including the PD Registry (July 2008 launch date) and outreach strategies. Minnesota Center for Professional Development is the new name of the resource center and website being developed by Metropolitan State University. MSU staff are also drafting concept papers that describe training and trainer approval, the career lattice, and learning and career guidance.

Research suggests that early literacy training for early care and education professionals and parents is a key to future school success. Two programs in Minnesota are seeing positive results. Words Work!TM and the University of Minnesota's Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program both work inside local preschool classrooms with teachers and staff and with parents in their homes. Parents and early care and education providers may also access early literacy activities at local libraries and children's museums.

The field of infant and early childhood mental health is relatively new, and mental health clinicians and consultants who specialize in this field are difficult to find, particularly in greater Minnesota. Training, certification, and endorsement of clinicians and consultants must be increased in order to increase the number of children served through mental health services. The University of Minnesota now offers certification in infant and early childhood mental health for clinicians and consultants through the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED). Also available throughout the state are training opportunities for professionals on how to use the DC: 0-3R diagnostic tool. Increasing

funding and support for these programs will help to increase the numbers of qualified early childhood mental health practitioners throughout the state. Furthermore, offering incentives to providers to practice in rural Minnesota will help to reduce some of the disparities in program availability seen between the metro area and greater Minnesota.

Identification and referral for mental health and developmental concerns are lacking in primary care. A lack of mental health professionals who are well-educated in early childhood mental health and available for follow-up on referrals is also a problem, particularly in greater Minnesota. Minnesota has been part of a five state demonstration project, *Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD II)*, funded by the Commonwealth Fund. This program has sought to improve identification, referral, and follow-up for early childhood mental health issues through collaboration between health and mental health providers who received specialized training in early childhood mental health. Results from this program should be shared and integrated at both the clinical and state levels.

Standards

Standards are integral to the core knowledge in PD system described above.

Head Start is a forerunner in accountability for performance standards. Head Start's detailed Program Performance Standards are the basis for federal and state monitoring. The standards center on early childhood development, health services, family and community partnerships, and program management and operations. They address children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development as well as parental involvement. Standards are also provided for work with children who have special needs. A recently added requirement is that half of the teachers in a center must have at least an associate degree in a field related to ECE or the equivalent credential.

In 2005, the Minnesota Departments of Education (MDE) and Human Services published Minnesota's *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Early Learning Standards*, which provide a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for children age 3 to 5. In 2007, The Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Health jointly produced *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to 3*. These standards serve as guides for teachers and providers to use in curricula, instruction, and assessment. The standards include expectations around: language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development, creativity and the arts, and physical and motor development. MDE has also produced a report in 2005 that aligns the Minnesota Early Learning Standards with the Minnesota K-12 Kindergarten Academic Standards and the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (2005).

The *Family, Friend and Neighbor—Best Practices* Project, led by Betty Emarita for Ready 4 K, identified best practices in FFN care and developed materials to broaden the understanding and use of the state’s early learning standards among extended family members, providers, and teachers providing care to children in cultural communities.

The FFN best practices project (published by Ready 4 K in 2007) examined child-rearing beliefs and practices in five cultural communities by a work group specific to each community – African American, Hmong, Latino-Mexican-Chicano, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and Somali.

These cultural communities prefer FFN care because it allows them to maintain cultural values, language, and traditions in their child care, and in turn their children. They see child care as a way of giving back to their community. Education, which is seen as way to better the community as a whole, is the responsibility of the community. Each community must also teach its children how to navigate the larger community around them, including withstanding discrimination and hurtful negative stereotypes of their culture.

The report also concludes that many of the early learning standards developed by the state may not be applicable or measurable in the same way for children of color as for Euro-American children, which may lead to children being perceived as not ready when they may be. Or it may lead to missing significant indicators of school readiness that are culturally specific. Resiliency – encouraging social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose in children – is a key feature highly valued in the cultural communities not included in the early learning standards.

Professional standards

The Minnesota Professional Development Council has developed core competencies for early childhood providers and is working with DHS and others to build the professional development system.

The Minnesota Core Competencies for early childhood and school-age education and care practitioners define what practitioners need to know and be able to do to provide quality education and care, helping child care professionals assess their skills and opportunities for growth and providing guidelines for education and training programs in meeting the needs of practitioners in the field. Professionals can be categorized into five different levels for each area of competency from Level 1 being a new professional with minimal training to Level 5 having an advanced degree in education or child development and extensive experience. The competency areas include: 1) child growth and development, 2) learning environment and curriculum, 3) assessment and planning for individual needs, 4) interactions with children, 5) families and communities, 6) health, safety and nutrition, 7) program planning and evaluation, and 8) professional development and leadership.

Accrediting bodies such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care have developed comprehensive, research-based criteria that promote quality early care and education experiences for young children and families. MnAEYC offers help to providers in navigating the accreditation process through their Accreditation Facilitation Project.

Communication

Minnesota does not have a systematic way to communicate about early care and education. The state does have several websites and telephone lines that provide information about early care and education to the public and various constituencies.

- *Parent Aware* is piloting a communication tool regarding the quality of early care and education programs and providers.
- The Part C Interagency Early Intervention program created a communication tool called the “*Development Wheel*,” which provides parents, practitioners and the general public information about normative early childhood development. The Wheel helps people understand developmentally appropriate expectations and care giving skill as well as indicators of developmental delays. The state departments that created this wheel distribute it nationally via mail and electronic versions.
- *The Minnesota Children with Special Health Needs Information and Assistance Telephone Line* offers a comprehensive listing of services provided throughout the state and county health and human services departments, hospitals, associations and public and private agencies.
- The *Minnesota Electronic Child Care information system* is an electronic database for child care information that the state and counties use. DHS also developed an online search tool for parents to use to find information about licensed providers.
- *Minnesota Immunization Hotline* provides information about immunization schedules, contraindications and precautions, administration, vaccine storage and handling and other issues that arise regarding immunizations and vaccine-preventable diseases.
- The *Parents Know* website is a comprehensive, informational website for parents of children from newborns to age 18. Information is broken into age groupings and in each age group, there is a glossary of information about common parenting issues, such as crying, language development, child care, and child safety. There are also message boards, question and answer sections, and external links for parents.

- MDE partnered with Ready 4 K to create and distribute *School Readiness Tip Cards* for parents. These tip cards describe indicators of child school readiness. They serve as a gauge for parents to measure their children’s readiness as well as a tool to help prepare the children for school.
- *Who Pays! Taking the MAZE Out of Funding* provides information on medical funding sources for families.
- *Your Link Newsletter* provides information about interagency early childhood intervention efforts.

Parent leadership development

Minnesota does not have a systematic way to develop parent leadership. Parent leadership and involvement are integral to well-known early childhood programs in Minnesota.

- Parental involvement is central to Head Start, which includes parent leadership efforts in its Program Performance Standards. Parents are encouraged to voluntarily help in the classrooms, in the planning, and in the governing of the Head Start program. Each family enrolled in the program must have a Family Partnership Agreement that details the needs of the family, strategies for addressing those needs, and options for parental involvement.
- Parent leadership and engagement are central principles within Minnesota’s Early Childhood and Family Education and Hennepin County’s Strong Beginnings Child Care Program. Both of these programs are built on the premise that parents are primary facilitators of early childhood education. Strong Beginnings strives to make parents partners with the child care centers in the early learning of children with special needs.
- Federal Title I funds can be used for increasing parental involvement in early childhood education for disadvantaged children, though the Title I funds do not require this or any other specific type of programming.

The Council on Civic Parent Leadership, formed through the merger of the Minnesota Parenting Association and the Council for Parent Leadership, believes that all parents are civic leaders and have the power to improve the quality of life within and beyond their families. The Council has worked with Ready 4 K on parent engagement strategies to increase parent involvement in Minnesota’s early childhood programs and initiatives.

The Cross-Cultural Leadership Action Program (*CLAP*) is a partnership between Ready 4 K and the Early Childhood Resource and Training Center. CLAP is an modeled after

Ready 4 K's Hmong Leadership and Training Project model, which has been led by Jesse Kao Lee. CLAP will focus on creating parent leaders from the Somali, American Indian, Latino, African American and Southeast Asian communities. The goal of the program is to equip parent leaders to break down the barriers to school readiness of young children in their communities.

Accountability

In March 2008, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) released the fifth kindergarten readiness assessment since 2002. MDE tracks school readiness by assessing kindergartners in a 10 percent random sample of schools on a voluntary basis. The Minnesota Work Sampling System Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist®2 was developed by MDE for this purpose. Shortly after kindergarten entry, teachers use the checklist to rate students' performance on a series of indicators that compose five domains: personal and social development; language and literacy; mathematical thinking; the arts; and physical development and health. Indicators and domains receive ratings of "not yet," "in process," or "proficient."

According to the *Minnesota School Readiness Study, Fall 2007*, at least 10 percent of kindergartners show a clear need for better pre-kindergarten preparation, remedial assistance in school, and are at risk of remaining behind their peers.¹ In each of the school readiness domains, about 30 to 40 percent of kindergartners are in process towards proficiency, inconsistently showing signs of proficiency; and half or more exhibit full readiness to succeed in school.

In 2007, compared with 2002, more kindergartners are proficient in personal and social development (going up from 39% in 2002 to 52% in 2007) and in language and literacy (going up from 44% in 2002 to 50% in 2007); the same percentage are "in process" in these two domains (40%); and fewer kindergartners are assessed as not yet proficient in personal and social development (going down from 13% to 8%) and in language and literacy (going down from 18% to 10%).

Kindergartners from higher income families are more likely to enter school ready to succeed. For example, the odds of being rated as "in process" or "proficient" in the mathematical thinking domain for a kindergartner from a higher income family (at or above 250% of the poverty level) is about three times the odds of a kindergartner in poverty. Income positively influences school readiness in the other four domains as well.

¹ The number of kindergartners not yet ready for school is probably higher than 10 percent, depending on the proportion of children who received "not yet" ratings on at least one domain. MDE publishes school readiness results for domains, not individual kindergartners. Ten percent is largest percentage of kindergartners not yet ready for school within a particular domain, specifically the language and literacy domain. The percent of children receiving a rating of "not yet" in *any* domain would better indicate the need for pre-kindergarten opportunities and school-based remedial assistance.

Racial/ethnic identity does not significantly influence school readiness in any of the domains after adjusting for differences in income, language, and parental education. This suggests that narrowing minority-white achievement gaps in elementary school depends in part on helping families with young children overcome economic, linguistic, and educational disadvantages.

Higher percentages of Minneapolis and St. Paul kindergartners receive ratings of "not yet," suggesting a greater need for pre-kindergarten opportunities in the Twin Cities. However, these results are strongly related to the demographic factors, and the 2007 report recommends further study to assess how results for students in the Twin Cities would compare to results of students with similar demographics in other parts of the state.

Head Start programs have the most demanding accountability measures in place. Each grantee is expected to meet the Head Start Performance Standards to be eligible for funding. The annual accountability methods include an extensive observational protocol, a teacher interview, a self-assessment, and a review of records.

The Minnesota Head Start Child Outcomes Project, led by Gayle Kelly, Executive Director of the Minnesota Head Start Association, Inc., is focused on preserving and promoting authentic assessment, based on new report on early childhood assessment by the National Academy of Sciences (*Early Childhood Assessment – Why, What, and How? Report Brief*, September 2008). This project is timely in light of the direction that the Early Childhood Caucus is headed with regard to a standards-based early care and education framework that would require benchmarks and indicators to track child progress and assessments for all children in all settings that would eventually be tied to funding.

The Maternal and Child Health Advisory Task Force must also report annually to the federal government in order to secure funding for the subsequent year. These reports must address 18 federal performance measures and 10 state performance measures. Examples of performance measures include immunization rates, infant and child mortality rates, teen pregnancy rates, child maltreatment incidents and infant blood-spot screening.

Title I provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet state academic standards. Federal funds are allocated through formulas based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state. Students who participate in the Title I Part A programs must reach the state's academic standards by the end of their time in the program. They are tested prior to entering kindergarten or annually in school to assess their academic competency.

Early Reading First, part of the Bush administration's "Good Start, Grow Smart" initiative, is designed to transform existing early education programs into centers of excellence that provide high-quality, early education to young children, especially those

from low-income families. The overall purpose of the program is to prepare young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills to prevent reading difficulties and ensure school success. Several Minnesota school districts have been awarded funding since 2002. Early Reading First uses standardized assessments of child learning and environment, and the results must be reported for all participating children. These assessments include the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III, The PALS Pre-K Upper Case Alphabet Knowledge task, and the Early Reading First score on the Literacy Environmental Checklist on the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit. Additionally, each Early Reading First grantee is required to set its own targets for performance. Their progress toward the targets is one primary gauge of effectiveness.

Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities has also implemented an individualized accountability structure. For this program, lead agencies develop interagency agreements and define accountability standards and reporting requirements for each grantee.

Summary of accomplishments

The following chart from the 2008 National Build evaluation report by Charlie Bruner and Michelle Stover Wright summarizes the system accomplishments in Minnesota relative to other Build states (Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Washington).²

² DRAFT report. *Laboratories of System-Building: BUILD's Emerging National Role in Knowledge Development*. Charles Bruner and Michelle Stover-Wright. July 2008.

4. Build State Accomplishments in Early Childhood System Building

	IL	MN	NJ	OH	PA	WA	MI
Infant/Toddler Focus							
Developed/developing infant-toddler strategy	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Quality Rating System							
Developed frameworks	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
In pilot process	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Moving to scale	✓			✓	✓		
Child Care Subsidies and Access							
Subsidy rates increased	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Early Learning Standards							
Developed standards birth to kindergarten		✓				✓	✓
Have developed pre-kindergarten standards	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Infant toddler standards/guidelines developed		✓		✓	✓		
Parent Leadership							
Created council or leadership initiative			✓		✓		✓
Family, Friend & Neighbor Care							
Sites participating in Sparking Connections initiative		✓				✓	
Developing focus or planning around FFN Care		✓			✓	✓	✓
Health, Mental Health Services							
Expanded health coverage	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Expanded developmental health services, child mental health	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Cross-sector planning on EC mental health/health	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved early intervention (Part C) and other services for children with disabilities	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Political Will Building & Public Engagement							
Significant business outreach and engagement		✓			✓	✓	✓
Public engagement, public relations, communications campaigns launched	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Participating in Born Learning Campaign		✓				✓	
Developed informational websites	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Implemented advocacy campaigns using web technology	✓	✓	✓			✓	

4. Build State Accomplishments in Early Childhood System Building (continued)

	IL	MN	NJ	OH	PA	WA	MI
Governance and Leadership							
Created state-level planning/governance structures	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded/improved state-local connections	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
More integrated cross-sector planning in coordination with the MCH Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Financial and Data Systems							
Early Learning Left Out studies completed	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Statewide Economic Impact Studies published	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Cost benefit studies of ECE programs		✓			✓		
Produced school readiness indicators		✓	✓	✓			✓
Conducted kindergarten readiness assessments		✓		✓			
Other significant data collection advances	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Chronology of public and private sector reports, actions, and achievements with regard to components of an early childhood system: 2000-2008

2000-2002

The current policy and systems work to establish well-connected and comprehensive early care and education services and opportunities for all Minnesota families is rooted in the former Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning and the groundwork established by the Early Childhood Finance Commission in 2000.

The Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning developed but did not implement a plan – *No Better Time: Starting Early for School Success* – for creating a better system of early childhood care and education for all families and children of Minnesota. The plan relied extensively on a broad review of the literature on early childhood systems, in particular the work of Sharon Lyn Kagen. The proposed system would coordinate existing resources, give parents more choices, support decision-making by local communities, and promote more quality. Recognizing that each community has different child care service needs, the plan provided multiple program models for responding to those needs.

The 2000 final report of the Minnesota Early Care and Education Finance Commission, *Action Plan for Early Care and Education in Minnesota*, proposed finance recommendations for funding an early childhood system that would help prepare children for school. The Commission also ratified a five-year action plan for coalition building, grassroots organizing and “social marketing” to create lasting change in Minnesota’s early care and education system, resulting in the creation of Ready 4 K. The Commission’s recommendations fit into three broad categories: providing parents with the time and tools they need to be better parents; ensuring quality and affordable child care; and enhancing the system’s ability to adequately prepare children for kindergarten.

Since 2002, Ready 4 K, a nonprofit school-readiness advocacy organization, has led the state’s participation in the national Build Initiative, a multi-state partnership created by the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative (ECFC), a consortium of national and local foundations that have substantial grant-making programs in early childhood care and education, including the McKnight Foundation in Minnesota. Build is national convener and early childhood resource that is helping Minnesota and five other states construct coordinated and responsive systems of programs, policies and services for young children and their families so that children are healthy and ready to succeed in school. Primarily

through the support of the McKnight Foundation, Ready 4 K carried out this system-building work with a host of partners, including key state department staff, foundation and business leaders, and early childhood advocates.

On October 25, 2002, Minnesota tragically lost several champions for children when a plane crashed and killed all aboard, including Senator Paul Wellstone, his wife Sheila, and Mary McEvoy, a campaign staffer and University of Minnesota early childhood professor and advocate.

2003

In the first few years of Build in Minnesota, the focus was on raising public awareness about the importance of early learning, with private sector champions leading the charge, particularly Chuck Slocum, the former state chairman of the Independent Republicans of Minnesota, Executive Director of the Minnesota Business Partnership, and Ready 4 K business consultant, and Art Rolnick, senior vice president and director of research of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

In the March 2003 *Fedgazette*, Art Rolnick, and a Ready 4 K board member, and Rob Grunewald, regional economic analyst for the Federal Reserve, published: “Early childhood development: Economic development with a high public return.” This research found that well-focused investments in early childhood development yield substantial public, as well as private, returns, with up to 12 percent return on the investment. The Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank subsequent proposal to empower low-income families with scholarships to purchase high-quality early care and education and to see, in turn, how the market responds, began being tested in 2007 by the City of Saint Paul with many local partners in two low-income neighborhoods under the auspices of MELF.

A 2003 Build baseline report for Ready 4 K by Wilder Research provided an annotated bibliography of published information on early childhood education and summarized Minnesota’s early childhood care and education system through 2003, identifying the system needs and gaps.

Early Childhood Care and Education in Minnesota: A Status Report (2003) described the recommendations in existing reports for early childhood education policy reform, which included: build awareness, increase local decision making, increase funding, encourage employer support, empower parents, provide universal voluntary services, increase quality and accessibility, integrate cultural awareness, and establish state-wide evaluation and accountability.

The report noted that, in 2001, philanthropic organizations were actively contributing to early childhood education with 80 percent of private funding coming from 34 grantmakers who cumulatively contributed about \$2.38 million.

The report identified a clear need for better-coordinated, comprehensive, affordable, accessible, stable, culturally sensitive services. Key system gaps identified in the report: 1) a lack of consensus on a vision for early childhood education; 2) inadequate coordination among agencies providing services; 3) early childhood care and education are not a legislative priority; 4) more strength based models are needed; 5) more champions are needed; 6) a comprehensive review of funding does not exist; 7) clearer quality measures need to be created; and 8) ongoing statewide monitoring should be implemented.

In 2003, Minnesota had no comprehensive, ongoing system for collecting data on children entering kindergarten. Most of what was available in 2003 focused on risks and deficits rather than assets and strengths. The 2002 Minnesota Department of Education's pilot study, *Minnesota School Readiness Initiative: Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance*, was the first state-wide study to assess school readiness based on proficiency in multiple domains.

In early 2003, Ready 4 K's Early Childhood Finance Reform Committee (formerly the Build finance subcommittee) began to research funding streams for all early childhood programs in Minnesota and developed these Principles of Early Childhood Education Finance Reform:

Invest in success for all children so that all families with young children have access to some voluntary early childhood services and experiences.

Target resources to those families who most need them.

Early childhood education is a public good to which everyone contributes.

Diversify sources and assume layered funding, combining portable and direct financing.

Fund services and infrastructure, including child care assistance subsidies, tax credits, parental leave, professional development initiatives, child care facilities grants, compensation initiatives, supports for kith and kin care and legally unlicensed care, child care resource and referral services, and research and development.

Frame ECE as an Investment. ECE is both an economic development investment and a school readiness investment that will leverage positive outcomes.

Insist upon equity, opportunity, and parent choice.

Minnesota's early childhood financing system shall have accountability mechanisms built in to increase responsiveness and effectiveness and allow for flexibility to meet families' changing needs.

The 2003 legislative session brought many changes and setbacks for early childhood programs and system-building in Minnesota, with a new governor, new legislative leadership, and about a \$5 billion budget deficit. State government was reorganized, disbanding key child-centered endeavors initiated by Governor Arne Carlson – the Children’s Cabinet and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning. Once again early childhood programs were split with the education programs going to a new Departments of Education, and child care programs and child care assistance going to the Department of Human Services. In addition, House and Senate committees reorganized and no longer had separate or parallel committees that oversaw child care. A new early childhood caucus was forming with about 20 members, but no clear legislative leaders for early education had yet emerged. The session ended with deep cuts for the 2003-2004 biennium, including cuts of \$86 million in child care subsidies for working parents, \$11 million (more than 25%) for ECFE, and about 25 percent of funding for Head Start.

In early June 2003, Ready 4 K convened a two-day retreat, “Building a Comprehensive, Quality Early Childhood System for Minnesota.” Small groups worked to arrive at a consensus on a vision for an early care and education system and to develop initial strategy ideas for developing the comprehensive early childhood system, taking into account the existing programs and gaps. Using the initial work accomplished at the retreat, work groups met over the summer of 2003 to develop more specific strategies grounded in three guiding principles – “Relationships Matter,” “Quality Matters,” and “Resources and Accountability Matter,” culminating in a comprehensive work plan titled, *Starting Early for School Success: Minnesota’s Road Map for School Readiness: A Five Year Plan*. Ready 4 K then convened 22 stakeholder meetings to present the Road Map, receive feedback, and talk about the policy agenda. By the end of 2003, Minnesota appeared to have a growing consensus on a statewide vision for early childhood care and education.

The Road Map defined an effective early childhood care and education system as having two-parts: Direct services and infrastructure. It must have high-quality, culturally responsive programs and services that touch the lives of children and families daily and fit the diverse needs of Minnesota’s communities. It must also have a sound infrastructure – the key elements behind the scenes that make programs and services work. The agreed upon assumptions for successful implementation of the strategies in the Road Map are:

Every child in Minnesota deserves adequate nurturing, opportunities, and the resources necessary to thrive and enter school ready to succeed.

Getting children ready for kindergarten is a matter of the public good and requires commitment from the state along with businesses, nonprofits, and local communities.

The Road Map cannot be implemented without the combined efforts of parents, families, and early childhood care and education programs as well as other champions, such as businesses, legislators, and community leaders.

The Road Map must be responsive to local community needs and recognize that needs vary in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and greater Minnesota.

Parents constitute an extremely effective group of advocates and must be mobilized if we are to see significant change.

The early childhood care and education system will require a significant infusion of new public and private money to fully implement the recommended strategies, and it will require accountability mechanisms to demonstrate improvements in the school readiness of Minnesota's children.

Ready 4 K's finance committee also reviewed a child care financing matrix developed by Louise Stoney, a co-founder with Anne Mitchell of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, and began brainstorming and discussing a wide range of possible finance strategies to raise the estimated \$210 million in new funding needed by the end of five years based on what other states were doing and on technical assistance on financing options from Charlie Bruner, the Executive Director of the Child and Families Policy Center, Director of the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, and the national Build evaluator and advisor. That level of investment, Ready 4 K noted, was needed to have a significant impact on ensuring that all low-income children under age 6 would have access to quality early learning in full and part-day settings. In addition, about 25 percent of low-income families with infants and toddlers would have access to home visits and early care and education experiences; the quality and availability of early childhood parent education and early care and education programs for young children ages 0-5 would improve, and the state would have new accountability mechanisms to measure results. Ready 4 K's finance committee remarked that it was a lot of money to raise and perhaps they should also consider how to reduce the costs and introduce cost efficiencies, including the use of informal care and volunteers.

Two high-level day-long early childhood events took place in 2003 – The Minnesota Children's Summit and a Federal Reserve research conference on early childhood investment as economic development.

The Children's Summit (May 30, 2003), focused on engaging University and community leaders on early childhood development, was sponsored by University of Minnesota President Bob Bruininks and Marti Erickson, a developmental psychologist and professor

in both Child Psychology and Family Social Science, the founding Director of the University of Minnesota's Children, Youth, & Family Consortium, director of the Harris Programs for the University's Center for Early Education and Development, co-chair of the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families, and the Chair of the 2003 Summit. (Marti retired in 2008).

The *Children's Summit: Starting Strong Action Plan* (2003), University of Minnesota, identified the three Cs of healthy child development:

Connection to caring, supportive adults that provides a context for building lifelong social skills and areas of special interest.

Competence, or sense of control, effectiveness, and resourcefulness, that comes only from real experiences of mastery and accomplishment.

Contribution, as in children realizing their ability to make a positive contribution to their family and community.

The Summit also outlined these commitments to action:

Early Childhood Policy Certificate – this credential was created to develop an individual's capacity to apply research-based knowledge to early childhood policy work.

Center of Excellence: Children's Mental Health – this interdisciplinary center promotes emotional health and well-being through prevention and intervention efforts. It links research, practice, and policy around children's mental health.

Business Leadership Team: Starting Strong – President Bruininks convened a team of CEOs from leading Minnesota companies to lead an intensive effort to build resources for early childhood education.

Building Regional Leadership in Southwestern Minnesota – the University of Minnesota's Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton was working to align action efforts in the region and state around early childhood issues.

The Federal Reserve research conference on early childhood investment as economic development (October 17, 2003) was co-hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and The McKnight Foundation, in cooperation with the University of Minnesota. This conference was one of the first opportunities for prominent economists to engage in early childhood education discussions. The presenters included Jack Shonkoff, dean of the Heller School at Brandeis University's and author of *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000); W.

Steven Barnett, professor of economics and education at Rutgers University; and Nobel Laureate James Heckman.

The Economics of Early Childhood Development: Lessons for Economic Policy Conference Summary (2003), Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, describes some common themes that emerged during the day include:

We must recognize the importance of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities in explaining schooling and socioeconomic success; social skills and motivation have large pay-offs in the labor market; needed investments in the development of young children should pay particular attention to those in most need, the earlier the better; investments in evidenced-based programs that match services to needs for young children will bring substantial returns, while consequences for poor investments will be costly.

2004

In January of 2004, Ready 4 K published *Early Learning Left Out: Public Spending on Children in Minnesota*, developed with the assistance of Dr. Charles Bruner of the Child and Family Policy Center of Des Moines, Iowa. The report was widely disseminated to Minnesota legislators, Minnesota Initiative Foundations' early childhood coordinators in 36 communities, and other key stakeholders for use in public awareness and education.

Key findings of *Early Learning Left Out*:

Although children's brain development and foundational learning are greatest in the first years of life, public spending is most commonly geared toward school age children. Specifically, in the first five years, about 75 percent of brain development occurs, but less than five percent of spending on education is for birth to age 5.

Early learning makes up only about one percent of Minnesota's total public investments, though consequences of lack of early learning cost Minnesota much larger sums of money through welfare and crime control.

In FY02, \$910 was spent per pre-school age child and \$5,449 was spent per school-age child. A significant proportion of spending for pre-school children was for child care subsidies, which in many cases was not high quality.

There were many unmet needs in early childhood education. For instance, Head Start only served one-third of children eligible, and ECFE only reached about 45 percent of parents. Almost 8,000 families were on the wait list for the child care basic sliding-fee scale program. Only about one in seven families who were eligible for subsidies received them.

For much of 2003 and 2004, a policy task force of the Minnesota School Readiness Business Advisory Council (MSRBAC, now named Minnesota Businesses for Early Learning or MnBEL), created and staffed by Ready 4 K, was studying the costs and benefits challenges and solutions for early care and education under the leadership of Al Stroucken, CEO of the H. B. Fuller Company, and Rob Johnson, Vice-President for Cargill. By September, the policy task force completed a report, *A Winning Start: A Plan for Investing Wisely In Early Childhood Development*, which the full MSRBAC council approved in October, 2004.

Also known as the “pumpkin report” for the pictures on its cover, this report pulled together all the data available at the time related to school readiness, clarified the business policy position, and marked the agreement among long-time advocates for school readiness and new business allies about the limitations of the current array of services in achieving school readiness and the costs and consequences to families and businesses. The report was particularly convinced by the early brain development research, concerned about the likelihood of the school readiness gap growing with demographic trends in Minnesota, and encouraged business to step to the plate to ensure a capable workforce in the future.

The report served as a proposal for a new a market-based, incentive-oriented approach to delivering high-quality early education, especially for children most at risk, an approach that increased standards, accountability, and accessibility. The proposal summarized the need for quality early childhood education systems, recommendations for filling this need, and costs and benefits associated with these recommendations.

In addition, the report formed the argument for establishing the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) as a public-private partnership for demonstrating models for cost-effective, high-quality early childhood education.

In December 2004, about 200 business leaders assembled for a half-day “school readiness” business forum sponsored by MSRBAC, with Governor Pawlenty as kick-off speaker. While the governor called school readiness important to the state’s future, he reiterated criticism of the system as “fragmented, complex and overlapping” with no good evidence of what really works. To address these concerns, business leaders, under the auspices of the Itasca Project, commissioned McKinsey & Company to complete an analysis of early care and education programs and their effectiveness. Results of that analysis were presented at the second annual Minnesota Business Forum on School Readiness in November 2005.

An internal report to the Early Childhood Funders Network in 2005 tallied the Network’s total funding on early childhood from 2002 to 2004 at \$18.8 million.

2005

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) was established by the Minnesota Legislature as a R&D incubator for innovation in early childhood care and education and for identifying cost-effective solutions for closing the school readiness gap. (More on MELF in 2006.)

The legislature also passed an Early Care and Education Coordination Bill, which called for the state agencies that work with children and families to coordinate efforts to work toward a seamless system for families. The bill had no funding, however.

State agencies that are part of the Build team in Minnesota moved forward on several initiatives to improve school readiness. The Minnesota Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of Human Services, developed and released Early Learning Standards or indicators of developmental progress for 3 and 4-year olds. The Department of Human Services participated on the citizen's task force that developed the plan for a quality rating system for child care programs as well as provided two staff to work on family, friend and neighbor best practices. Finally, both these departments conducted training sessions with early care and education programs on how to use the learning standards and school readiness assessments.

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards, (2005), Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Human Services, provides a framework and defines a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for pre-school age children. It was designed to help create a shared responsibility between parents, professionals, and policy makers for educating young children.

The indicators of progress are divided into six domains: social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language and literacy development, creativity and the arts, cognitive development, and physical and motor development. These indicators were intentionally written to be research-based, clear, measurable, comprehensive, manageable, and applicable to diverse children. This report also includes strategies that family members and caregivers can use to facilitate development.

A March 2005 report by Laura Silberfarb for the Bush Foundation, provided an overview of the early childhood education and care system in Minnesota, with specific emphasis on the birth to three populations and low-income families. The report included a description of the major programs and key legislation as of 2005; data on the quality of early childhood education; an overview of family, friend, and neighbor care; details of large quality improvement proposals; and recommendations based on key findings.

Key Findings on the Minnesota Early Education and Care Systems (2005) described early child education and care systems as complex and uncoordinated, with no assurances of high-quality; and, in some cases, mediocre care is being subsidized. In 2005, spending on early child education and care in Minnesota was \$1.7 billion, with 65 percent in the form of out-of-pocket payments by parents. Summarizing findings from Wilder's household child care use and FFN studies, this report concluded that many low-income families were not always able to access high-quality care for their children due to lack of available options, lack of knowledge about subsidies, and high rates of FFN care.

The report noted that the Infant Toddler Training Intensive has been a valuable tool in increasing the quality of infant and toddler care, but policy priorities and funding cuts have shifted to four and five year olds and school readiness away from quality care for infants and toddlers.

In terms of quality measurement and improvement, only Head Start has a systematic, funded infrastructure for measuring quality of care. New core practitioner competencies, 0-3 learning guidelines, and the proposed quality rating system offer potential for more complete coordination of quality care; but unlicensed care has no quality standards and minimal monitoring, and most quality improvement initiatives do not include FFN care. The potential is great for coordination of support for FFN care across systems (Head Start, ECFE, CCR&Rs, and health systems); however, any assistance for quality improvement for FFN providers would need to be voluntary.

In April 2005, the Children's Defense Fund Minnesota and Child Care Works released an analysis of the early childhood state budget cuts.

Missed Opportunities Produce Costly Outcomes (2005) reported that cuts in the 2004-2005 fiscal year doubled the monthly out-of-pocket co-payments for child care and resulted in 10,000 children no longer accessing child care assistance despite their continued need. The cuts to child care put Minnesota in the bottom third of the nation for child care assistance eligibility. Working families were having tremendous difficulty accessing child care assistance, and the negative impacts have been especially high for greater Minnesota, where many providers were either operating with no profit or going out of business.

The Itasca Project is a 40-member group of CEOs in the Twin Cities metro region plus the governor, the mayors of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the president of the University, and the president of the McKnight Foundation. The Itasca Project supports initiatives that foster economic growth and social well-being by enlisting local business to participate in corporate citizenship activities. In 2005, it made early childhood one of its six key issues and commissioned McKinsey and Company to assess the current condition of funding and programs. The report, delivered at the November 2005 MnBEL school readiness conference, provided the base of facts regarding government funding (the inputs) and participation rates (the outputs) of early care and education programs in Minnesota.

Many business leaders, operating on a “gut level” belief that investing in early childhood is essential to stay economically competitive and to be successful in the future, had been waiting to see this information to have a better understanding of the lay of the land and what is needed to move forward in Minnesota.

The McKinsey and Company report found that Early Childhood Development programs in Minnesota annually cost \$1.5B (\$1.2B from parents to providers, \$169M from federal government, \$145M from state government and \$23M from local governments). About half of the state spending is for six early childhood education programs administered by the Minnesota Department of Education, mostly designated for Head Start and ECFE. The other half is spending for two child care subsidy programs administered by the Department of Human Services (MFIP, Basic Sliding Fee). Participation rates in early education programs range from 30 to 50 percent of those eligible.

The report highlighted a key system barrier – that existing programs are categorically separated as either education programs in the Minnesota Department of Education or child care programs in the Department of Human Services – and that more must be done to increase participation rates by eligible families, to clearly measure outcomes, not just inputs and outputs, and to embed early education in child-care services, with special attention to reforms for public programs serving most "at risk" children.

That early education is a good investment was shared by many in the business community. In 2005 (and 2006), Al Stroucken, the former CEO of H.B. Fuller, was the core champion of this shared vision when he chaired MnBEL and the United Way’s Success By 6 and was a key member of Itasca Project’s Early Childhood Committee. Stroucken then became the first board chair of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) before moving to Ohio.

Nevertheless, the McKinsey and Company report was a vivid reminder that, despite all the organizing, advocacy, awareness building, and new early childhood champions marshaled by Ready 4 K, more had to be done to increase participation rates by eligible families and to clearly measure outcomes. Build and other early childhood stakeholders considered the MELF as an important opportunity to research how to cost-effectively close the readiness gap and to make a seamlessly blended system, even when the existing programs are categorically separated as either education programs in the Minnesota Department of Education or child care programs in the Department of Human Services.

2006

The Minnesota legislature approved \$1 million for the NorthStar Quality Improvement and Rating System demonstration to acknowledge quality child care providers, increase the number of quality program choices and provide consumer information and program quality ratings to parents; however, the Governor vetoed the funding due to concerns that the rating system was too focused on adults and inputs and not enough on child outcomes. A different version of the quality rating system is being piloted with private funds through the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation.

The 2006 Minnesota legislature appropriated \$287,000 for the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and Intervention Program. The assessment will examine the school readiness of 10 percent of children starting kindergarten and work with children who are identified as not yet ready for school. A year-end assessment will evaluate the progress made during the school year.

The Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services disseminated The Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards for children age 3 to 5 and developed standards for children age 3 and younger. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Human Services initiated efforts to improve the child care workforce professional development system.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Ready 4 K, Child Care Resource and Referral, and other agencies continue working together to develop policies and systems that will support FFN caregivers.

Membership in Minnesota Business for Early Learning (MnBEL) increased from nearly 200 to 250 businesses during 2006, and the bi-partisan Early Childhood Caucus grew to 132 members.

The Ready 4 K board approved their 2007 policy framework –*Get Minnesota Ready for K!* with proposed funding of \$395 million to achieve healthy beginnings for children 0 to 3; quality early learning experiences for children 3 to 5; and the infrastructure to improve quality, access, and accountability.

In July 2006, Governor Pawlenty convened a School Readiness Summit to explore ways to improve early childhood education in Minnesota. The Summit, one of seven sponsored by the National Governors' Association, was hosted by the Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services.

The Minnesota Governor's Summit of School Readiness: Combined Report and Program Analysis by Research Element summarized the ten critical features and practices found through research to be essential for successful early childhood programs and which should be incorporated into Minnesota's early childhood systems: 1) begin early, 2) target at risk children, 3) increase intensity of instruction, 4) provide compensatory services, 5) train professional on an on-going basis, 6) build a strong accountability system, 7) deliver comprehensive services, 8) provide low child to staff ratios, 9) increase duration of services, and 10) coordinate transition to kindergarten and early grades.

These recommendations for improving early childhood programs and school readiness outcomes emerged from the Summit proceedings:

Increase the duration, intensity, and continuity of care of Minnesota's publicly funded program and explore opportunities to include FFN caregivers into existing public programs.

Embed intentional, concentrated learning experiences, especially in core subject areas, in all early childhood care settings

Develop curriculum guidelines, and increase parental awareness of early childhood indicators of progress.

Coordinate early childhood care and education programs and transition to kindergarten, developing individualized plans and teaching parents about the kindergarten transition.

Train caregivers in observations, assessment, and curriculum planning; create incentives that reward increased professional development.

Two national reports on early care and education with Minnesota connections were released in 2006.

The Center for Law and Social Policy released *Starting Off Right: Promoting Child Development from Birth in State Early Care and Education Initiatives*, which promoted healthy child development by providing data on infant and toddler development and early education needs from birth to age three and examples of promising strategies. For promising strategies in Minnesota, it pointed to the early learning guidelines for child development from birth to age three and the state's amended contracts with the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network to require outreach to FFN caregivers, especially those working with infants and toddlers.

Promising strategies identified in other states included: 1) ensuring highly qualified, well-compensated teachers; 2) linking comprehensive services such as health, nutrition, support, and social services to improve healthy growth and development; 3) creating coordinated governance for all pre-school age programming; and 4) providing adequate funding across birth to five programs.

The Families and Work Institute released *A Multi-Site Evaluation of Community-Based Strategies to Support Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregivers of Children*, which included Minnesota as one of three pilot sites, implemented through a collaboration with the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network and child care resource and referral organizations in St. Paul and Mankato. The other sites were in Oklahoma and Washington. The successful and replicable strategies for supporting FFN care identified in this project were used to guide the state's 2007 legislation supporting FFN caregivers (see below).

2007-2008

A wide range of early childhood stakeholders were involved in developing the 2007 policy agenda spearheaded by Ready 4 K, including the 65 early childhood MIF coalitions around the state, Head Start, School Readiness programs in the public schools, ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education), CCR&R, Child Care Works (CCW), some K-12 superintendents and principals, Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota, foundations, legislators, and community leaders. In this process, Minnesota Build achieved common agreement to the goal of "80 percent of children ready for kindergarten by 2012."

Legislative leaders from both parties and both legislative bodies, as well as Governor Pawlenty, highlighted early childhood education as a necessary investment, and finance strategies for funding early learning choices for parents received much discussion. Four approaches to improving school readiness competed for financial support – all day everyday kindergarten, universal preschool for 4-year olds, the market-based scholarship model targeted to low-income households, and a hybrid model using Louise Stoney's financing mechanism of both 'portable' private and public money to parents and 'direct' funding to programs to fund infrastructure needs/quality improvement.

Several reports and conferences spotlighted early childhood research in 2007.

The Itasca Project Task Force on Early Childhood Development released *The Economics of Early Childhood Care and Education in Minnesota*, which used a market framework to argue for investments in early childhood education.

The Itasca Project identified four factors that collectively limit quality in early childhood education and can produce a widening achievement gap: 1) weak buyers, 2) weak suppliers, 3) lack of information, and 4) minimal standards and accountability.

Eighty percent of annual spending on early childhood care and education comes from private investments. The public spending is usually in the form of child care subsidies that are applied to the private market, which limits public accountability for investments.

High-quality care costs between \$9,500 and \$15,000 per year, yet most families in Minnesota spend about \$6,000 each year for child care. This means that we spend about \$1 billion less each year than is required for high-quality care. In order to address the weak buyer problem, the authors recommend increasing purchasing power for high need families through scholarship and mentorship models. They also recommend improving coordination of existing public programs to better serve families' needs, especially by creating connections between child care and education programming.

Minnesota has over 200,000 caregivers in centers, licensed homes, and FFN care with no collective ability to set standard rates, share administrative costs, or benefit from resource pooling. The Task Force suggests that providers will need help to improve their quality and stay competitive. Resources should be focused on supporting providers as they increase quality to meet the new standards that are emerging.

The Task Force recommends testing the scholarship, consumer-driven approach for investing in the highest-need children; improving service access and coordination; and implementing a quality rating system, which would allow parents and policymakers to make informed decisions about their investments. It would also increase accountability for providers who are competing for resources.

Education Minnesota, a union of more than 70,000 educators, entered the early childhood policy debate with a 2007 report encouraging a greater priority in Minnesota for early childhood education.

Minnesota Needs High-Quality Early Childhood Education synthesized information collected over the last several years around early childhood education in Minnesota and the United States, with an emphasis on pre-kindergarten programming.

The report repeats the often cited figure that more than half of the children in Minnesota enter kindergarten not fully prepared, especially true for children with parents who did not finish high school, do not speak English at home, and have a low household income. The readiness gap is attributed to a lack of coordinated, comprehensive early childhood services available and accessible to vulnerable families. Minnesota has failed to prepare children for kindergarten by making early education a low policy and funding priority. Early childhood education is seen more as a family responsibility. In Minnesota, early education spending has been repeatedly cut and treated as a form of discretionary spending. The programming that is offered is unstructured and uncoordinated, which decreases accountability and increases inequity across programs.

The report concludes that, across all stakeholder groups, the consensus is that the best action for addressing this gap and for achieving the best return on the investment is preventing the gap through high-quality pre-kindergarten. The authors of this report recommend that: 1) high quality pre-kindergarten be available free to all three and four year olds at risk; 2) move toward integrating pre-kindergarten in public school systems; 3) expand to provide affordable pre-kindergarten for all families; 4) require programs to meet minimum standard to receive funding; 5) require staff to meet licensing requirements; and 6) provide adequate, reliable funding for pre-kindergarten education.

A Harvard University report from the Center on the Developing Child began circulating in the summer of 2007. The authors combined extensive scientific research on early childhood brain and cognitive development and program evaluation to provide a foundation to promote a cohesive, effective, viable policy agenda.

A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy – Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children argued that early and intensive care and support beginning pre-natally provides significant benefits for vulnerable children and families experiencing adversity, leading to strong returns on investment. This includes prenatal care, medical care, home visiting, and high-quality care and education. Intensive services targeted at toxic stressors, such as abuse, neglect, maternal depression, parental substance abuse, or family violence can prevent disruptions in brain development and promote healthy developmental outcomes. No single program approach or delivery method has been shown to be the gold standard. In fact, a diversity of approaches has been shown to be effective, especially given the broad range of issues to address. Cuts in spending can reduce the effectiveness of the programming. The key is to establish common quality standards and to monitor fidelity to the models and results.

Growth and Justice, a relatively new progressive economic think tank committed to a prosperous and fair Minnesota's economy sponsored a conference in November 2007, *Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students*, which explored how to get the highest return from investments in early childhood, K-12, and higher education. The conference presentations and related research-based resources on evaluations of educational programs; teachers; curriculum, instruction and assessment; education structures; out-of-school time; and family/child experiences can be found on its website http://www.growthandjustice.org/NEW_RESEARCH.html.

Rolnick and Gruenwald described their MELF pilot, and Arthur Reynolds reported on findings from his study of the Parent-Child Centers and on studies of all-day kindergarten.

Full-day kindergarten has minimal benefits relative to half-day kindergarten, and that most benefits do not last for more than one year. The return on investment for full-day kindergarten is around zero. Effects of preschool plus school-age interventions (PK-3) for at-risk children extend well into adolescence. Class size reductions, school-based social skills training, and child-parent focused programs yield some of the highest estimated returns. These programs return in the range of \$3 to \$9 for each dollar invested.

Cost-effectively reproducing model programs at a large scale has yet to be accomplished. Conference presenters contended that this is possible if investments are market-based, start early, provide incentives for high quality, go to evidence-based school readiness programs, use cost-benefit analyses to set priorities, and make a long-term commitment.

The Early Childhood Research Collaborative (ECRC) hosted its second national conference in December 2007 at the Minneapolis Federal Reserve. Art Rolnick and Arthur Reynolds, University of Minnesota professor of child development, served as co-hosts. As a follow-up to the 2003 conference, this time participants were exploring the sustained impacts of early childhood education and how current early childhood cost-benefit research can inform public policy on how and where to invest. More than 80 participants from across the country attended *The Human Capital Conference Series on Early Childhood Development: Critical Issues in Cost Effectiveness in Children's First Decade*. About 20 researchers and academicians presented research findings with a focus on cost-effectiveness and methodology, particularly regression discontinuity techniques to show program effects without randomly assigned control-group studies. Papers drew from longitudinal studies of High/Scope Perry Preschool, Carolina Abecedarian Project, and Child-Parent Center Preschool plus other evaluations of Head Start, The Nurse Family Partnership, and universal pre-kindergarten in Oklahoma and New Jersey. Papers and a conference summary are on the ECRC webpage (<http://www.earlychildhoodrc.org/>)

Conference attendees stressed that a great deal of work needs to be done to improve the evaluations of these programs and to bring the interventions to scale. Key recommendations include: 1) conduct new high-quality research on recent statewide preschool programs; 2) attempt to link research findings across stages of development; 3) find stronger methodologies and better controls; 4) differentiate between program effectiveness and efficacy; and 5) systematically calculate economic returns across ages and program types.

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation commissioned Jodi Sandfort and a group of graduate students to conduct a gap analysis, comparing current early childhood education governance and financing in Minnesota with promising practices in other states. The study consisted of interviews with key stakeholders from Minnesota and nine states focused on early childhood. The report presents themes that arose from this comparison and the projected consequences of continuing with the current system.

Solving the Puzzle: The Gap in Minnesota's Early Care and Education Finance and Governance Structures (2008) describes how Minnesota has no central leader or single body or group in charge of governing or coordinating early childhood programming. Public funding is administered separately through three state departments, and standards for accountability are not consistent between departments. Philanthropic and private non-profit organizations, such as Early Child Funders' Network, Minnesota Initiative Foundations, and the Metro Alliance for Healthy Families, have taken up leadership roles for parts of the system but not for whole (e.g., funding, community organizing, and home-visiting). The authors conclude that this decentralized approach has resulted in a lack of shared vision and goals, duplicated efforts, no common structure or policy, chaotic funding streams, siloed operations that are divided into either child care or early education programs that unaligned and unconnected, competition for scarce resources, inadequate accountability, and ineffective advocacy.

The report proposes that early childhood follow models that have been successful in higher education, and housing and community development. Otherwise, in the absence of a coherent system, the projected consequences are likely to be 1) money not being spent as efficiently as possible; 2) lack of preparation for entering kindergarten; 3) achievement gaps; 4) future workforce depletion; 5) few opportunities to implement large scale model programs; and 6) limited access to affordable, high-quality child care.

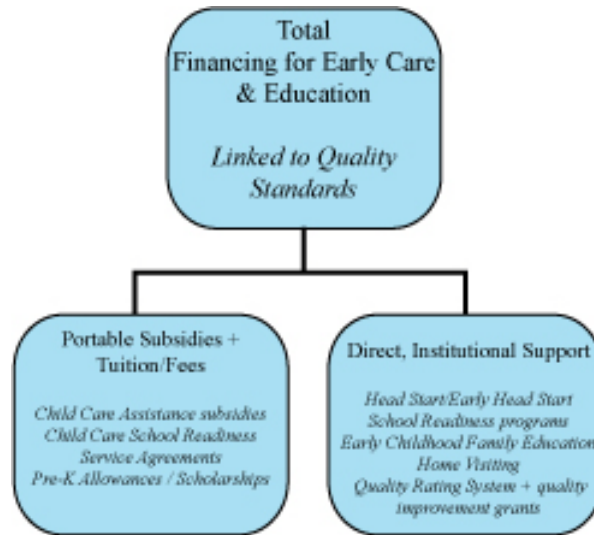
The next steps recommended in this report include: 1) decide on a convening body; 2) commit to a common vision; 3) agree to a unified message; 4) identify a public leader; 5) align partnerships; 6) define roles for stakeholders; 7) decide on a governance model; 8) mandate authority; and 9) coordinate funding streams.

In April 2008, the University of Minnesota Children, Youth, and Family Consortium hosted the first Family Policy Impact Seminar and issued a report that summarizes and synthesizes information that was presented. Family Impact seminars connect objective research and policymaking in non-partisan way. The presentations focused on viewing policy through the ecological model and the lens of a Family Impact Checklist.

Minnesota family impact seminar briefing report: Options for a responsive and accountable early childhood system in Minnesota (2008) outlines the ecological model and family impact principles, which take a strengths-based approach to support vulnerable families.

Louise Stoney from the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance described an early care and education system that consists of 1) quality rating standards, which are most likely to result in good outcomes for children; 2) professional development programs to train practitioners on quality standards; 3) monitoring and accountability to ensure compliance with standards; 4) financial assistance directed towards meeting a common set of standards, and 5) engagement and outreach to teach consumers why quality standards are important and how to use them.

Stoney also articulated to seminar participants a new, emerging approach for financing an early care and education system tied to quality standards. As shown in the diagram below, the public and private financing would include both portable subsidies that follow the child and direct support to programs and institutions. Layering is an optimal way to use money from multiple sources to create a comprehensive high-quality system. Sharing staff and administrative costs among programs can also improve efficiency and quality.



Stoney described this same financing framework to legislative leaders in an October meeting supported by the Greater Twin Cities United Way.

Kindergarten through grade 3 in Minnesota

Approximately 240,000 children are enrolled in K-3 classrooms in Minnesota's 334 school districts.

Transition to kindergarten

Adjusting to kindergarten can be difficult for some children, particularly if they have not had prior experience being with groups of children in structured settings or if their parents are not familiar with the school setting. Several coalitions associated with the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative are implementing kindergarten transition initiatives, easing the transition to kindergarten by building relationships between parents, early care and education providers, K-12 teachers, and schools and by promoting parent involvement.

For example, in Proctor/Hermantown, the Bridges to Kindergarten program designed by early childhood and K-12 educators, involves parents of 4-year-olds in activities to connect with schools a full year before school begins. In the Brainerd Lakes Area, the Ready Set Go project addresses the lack of consensus on the best way for children to learn by getting child care, preschool, and kindergarten teachers to work together. In Watonwan County, the Kindergarten Transition Team makes sure that curriculum and expectations are in sync by incorporating information and ideas from child care, preschool, and kindergarten teachers.

Each of these projects ease the transition from preschool to kindergarten by involving parents in activities that prepare children; by helping parents and schools reach a common set of expectations and aspirations; and by coordinating and aligning otherwise detached aspects of child care, preschool, and kindergarten. Smoothing the transition to school depends to a large degree on parents, child care providers, and teachers working together to ensure children have a high quality educational experience.

All-day kindergarten

Though 30 states pay for all-day kindergarten, Minnesota does not. In recent years, there has been some movement by the Minnesota Legislature to provide funding for all-day kindergarten. The First Grade Preparedness Program (Minnesota Statute 124D.081) provides funding to eligible schools for all-day kindergarten, pre-kindergarten programs, or both. For the 2007-08 school year, 67 schools were eligible for \$3.35 million in First Grade Preparedness funding, which was expected to reach approximately 4,000 children. In addition, the 2007 Omnibus E-12 Education Act increased the amount districts receive for each kindergartener, but only by about 10 percent of what is needed for fully-funded,

all-day, every-day kindergarten for all children in Minnesota, which is estimated to cost \$160 million.

According to the director of the Minnesota Elementary School Principal's Association (P. Fred Storti), only about a third of Minnesota schools offer all-day kindergarten. Districts offering all-day kindergarten currently divert funding from other sources or charge fees, limiting eligibility to those districts and parents that can afford it.

The rationale for all-day, every-day kindergarten is based on studies that indicate that all-day kindergarten improves academic achievement, reduces the achievement gap, decreases costs in later years, supports literacy and child development, and improves attendance (The Minneapolis Foundation, 2006). Moreover, Minnesota parents overwhelmingly support all-day kindergarten, and with Minnesota's school choice options, many who are in districts that do not offer all-day kindergarten, choose to send their children into those schools that do (Conversation with Fred Storti, October 2008).

However, a 2006 study using the Early Child Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 data found that achievement increases resulting from all-day kindergarten disappear by the time children reach the third grade (Cannon et al, 2006). Opponents, such as the nonprofit research, development, and service agency WestEd, also argue that all-day kindergarten takes away from play time that is necessary for young children, and competes for scarce early childhood resources.

Charter schools

Minnesota was the first state in the nation to authorize charter schools; the nation's first charter school opened in St. Paul in 1992. According to the Center for School Change, Minnesota has 143 charter schools, just over half of which serve elementary students.

Charter school students are more likely than students in district schools to be students of color, low-income or students with limited English proficiency. Like district schools, charter schools receive government funding and are free to students, but unlike district schools that are overseen by a district school board, each charter school operates autonomously. Charter schools offer parents with additional educational choices for their children, and can provide other experiences or unique learning opportunities that students may not have exposure to in district schools. Opponents argue that students in charter schools have lower levels of achievement. An Evaluation Report by the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor found that a smaller percentage of Minnesota's charter schools made Adequate Yearly Progress than district schools on the 2007 standardized assessments; however, in taking into account the different demographics, differences in student performance were minimal.

Quality Compensation

Quality Compensation for Teachers (Q-Comp) is a voluntary teacher support program enacted by the Minnesota legislature in 2005 to support teachers in K-12. The program grants money to districts and charter schools to provide professional training for teachers and compensation based on performance, rather than the typical “step and ladder” system. As such, districts seeking the grant money must have approval from their teacher’s union. During the 2008-09 school year, the Minnesota Department of Education funded 45 districts and 27 charter schools to implement a Q-Comp program.

The School Improvement Division of MDE reports that they are only now beginning an impact evaluation, so at this time, the impact the program has had on K-3 teachers and students remains unknown. Fred Storti of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association points out that the program does provide additional funding for professional training, but the funding comes from legislative tax dollars already levied for education, rather than generating new money.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to Intervention or Instruction (RTI) is a three-tiered approach to education in which educators provide high quality instruction that is matched to students’ needs and decisions are based on each student’s response to the instruction. While some believe that RTI is focused on assessing academic or behavioral issues, others see RTI as a comprehensive framework that can be applied to all socio-emotional aspects children may face. In tier one, all students receive high quality instruction. In tier two, educators provide additional interventions or instruction to children who are struggling, usually in small group settings. In tier three, those students who are not responsive to the additional intervention receive further individualized instruction. In contrast to traditional approaches to students with academic or behavioral challenges, RTI assesses all students on an ongoing basis based on their response to different interventions, rather than using a standardized test to assess children who are failing.

The Minnesota RTI Task Force developed guidelines for a RTI model in September 2006 to help Minnesota schools implement RTI, and a number of state and national centers support teachers and schools in implementing RTI. Among those include the Minnesota Center on Response to Intervention, which is funded through the St. Croix River Education District by a grant from the Minnesota legislature. The main focus of this state center is to coach sites on implementing research-based RTI practices. In addition, according to Vicki Weinberg at the Minnesota Department of Education, MDE is currently in its second year of funding eight pilot sites to implement RTI. The focus has been on providing job-embedded professional development and coaching. Without a

clear state funding source, many districts are finding creative ways to pay for RTI, such as through non-governmental grants, or are implementing RTI as part of other state programs, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

Minnesota Reading Corps

Minnesota Reading Corps is a public-private collaborative program of ServeMinnesota, the Minnesota Literacy Council, and the St. Croix River School District. The program uses AmeriCorps members and other trained volunteers to provide one-on-one literacy education for children age 3 to grade 3 who need extra support in reading. Nearly 400 tutors are working with 9,000 disadvantaged children in 160 preschools, Head Start programs, and schools. Over two years, with \$2 million from the state, \$15 million in federal funding, and \$1 million in business backing, the program expects to serve 15,000 children. The literacy instruction follows a research-based Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Student performance data are used by teachers to modify instruction for individual students as well as for assessing program outcomes.

Project Early Kindergarten

Saint Paul Public Schools' Project Early Kindergarten is a pre-kindergarten program at elementary schools, child care centers, and family child care homes aligned with the Saint Paul Public School's K-12 curriculum model. The model emphasizes standards-based education and extensive professional development, bringing children's preschool experience into alignment with the educational experience they will have in later years. The program offers a rigorous academic approach for children who are English Language Learners, come from low-income families, or need Special Education services. Ultimately, the program intends to help close Saint Paul's achievement gap.

PEK is funded primarily by Saint Paul Public Schools and The McKnight Foundation, which provided an initial three-year grant in 2004 and renewed funding in 2007. PEK extends the program to child care settings through a partnership with Resources for Child Caring. The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation also contributes funds to the child care portion of the program.

The program began in 10 Saint Paul schools in fall 2005, and expanded to community child care settings a year later. PEK has since become the model for pre-kindergarten programs district-wide. As of fall 2008, 28 district elementary schools, 8 child care centers, and 13 family child care homes offer pre-kindergarten programs following the PEK approach. School sites offer the program to 4-year-olds, and child care sites to 2½- to 4-year-olds.

A 2007 evaluation by Wilder Research found that principals, teachers, and parents report very positive feedback about PEK, and PEK participants have an advantage (academically and in social skills) over their demographically similar classmates upon kindergarten entry.

Minneapolis Public Schools are currently planning to implement a similar program next year.

Third grade progress

Minnesota children are tested for reading and mathematics proficiency in the third grade. The third grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment results provide some indication of whether children are learning necessary skills in their first three years of formal education. In 2004, 73 percent of Minnesota third graders (among the 98% of enrolled students tested) were at or above grade level in reading, and 71 percent were at or above grade level in mathematics (Davison, 2004). Those population groups not meeting adequately yearly progress as defined by No Child Left Behind were of Black or Hispanic ethnicity, designated as limited English proficiency, in Special Education, new to their districts, attending school in Minneapolis or St. Paul, or had transferred schools two or more times midyear.

Educational organizations

Numerous organizations are working to improve Minnesota's educational system, through advocacy, professional development, awareness, and research. Most notably, the **Minnesota Education Association** is the state's National Education Association affiliate with 70,000 union members. Additionally, there are over 15 education associations of school districts, school board members, administrators, principals, teachers, and parents, such as the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials, Minneapolis Rural Education Association, and Minnesota School Boards Association.

There are also several partnerships and collaborations that bring groups of organizations and individuals together under a common vision or goal. Among them include The **Minnesota Alliance for Student Achievement**. The Alliance, consisting of 15 education organizations, believes all children deserve high quality education and advocate for increased accountability in the form of improved student achievement. In 2008, the Alliance is advocating for increased general education, kindergarten readiness, and special education funding.

Minnesota P-16 Educational Partnership's vision is for all Minnesota's students, pre-kindergarten through college, to receive a high quality education. P-16's working groups are currently focusing on: research to prepare preK-12 students for postsecondary

success, aligning the partners' priorities, and aligning the partnership's efforts with other efforts taking place through the state or across the nation.

Schools for Equity in Education is an association of 61 Minnesota school districts for equal, adequate, and sustainable education funding across Minnesota. Their 2008 legislative platform includes increasing the general education basic formula, developing a standards-based funding formula, and increasing the equalization of levies across districts to account for variations in the property value of districts.

Stakeholder ideas and advice regarding early care and education assets and gaps

Introduction

To seek and gather advice and ideas from a variety of stakeholders about the early childhood business plan, Wilder Research facilitated 11 group discussions around the state. The locations included Bemidji, Duluth, Glenwood, Northfield, Rochester, Sauk Rapids, Twin Cities (three groups), Walker, and Worthington. Participants included early childhood caucus leaders, early childhood coordinators from the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, staff from the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, parents, teachers, licensed child care providers, child care center directors, child care resource and referral staff, county social services, public health, community education, ECFE, K-12, higher education, business, law enforcement, early childhood coalition members, foundations, health and mental health care providers, and researchers. Wilder also conducted personal interviews with seven early childhood care and education stakeholders (identified as “PI” in the comments). Altogether, about 175 people participated.

The content of the discussions and interviews was on vision and goals; strengths and gaps of strategies to achieve school readiness; the role of foundations, government, the early childhood care and education community, families and parents, K-12 and higher education, business, and the community-at-large in achieving school readiness and closing the gaps; challenges and opportunities to address in the business plan; and recommendations pertaining to funding early childhood care and education.

Vision and goals

Participants in the group discussions and interviews were first asked to describe what school readiness meant to them and if the goal of early care and education was more school readiness.

Participants named a range of factors that add up to school readiness:

- Have some pre-literacy skills, such as being able to identify letters and numbers
- Be exposed to language
- Be at an appropriate level of maturity

- Be semi-independent
- Be patient
- Have social skills, such as sitting in a group and responding to others
- Be self-confident
- Be physically and mentally healthy, including dental, vision, hearing, and nutrition
- Be curious for learning
- Have been in a formal education environment
- Have personal hygiene and self-care skills

Ultimately, most participants agreed that school readiness should be seen as a broad and inclusive developmental process – cognitive, language, literacy, and social skills development, all the social-emotional aspects of child development that help children be successful in school and beyond, the physical and nutritional health. The goal of early childhood care and education, then, is the healthy development of the “whole child” and having children that reach their full potential, are “life ready,” not just “school ready.”

School readiness is a wonderful goal, but not to the exclusion of kids. We work so hard getting kids ready for school that we forget about the kids themselves and making sure that their lives are good right now. School is a mark in the road to make sure they are happy and healthy. [Glenwood]

I do think school readiness is a good endpoint for the quality early care and education that includes a whole range of experiences and relationships that children have. [PI]

Readiness is more a state of mind than a state of knowledge. [Bemidji]

World readiness. Not just school. We want our children to be a part of this world, to be happy and successful. [Duluth]

Today it is such a waste of the human potential not to invest so that each child has the opportunity to grow to their own potential, whatever that may be. We need people to be successful. It's a good thing for the citizenry, the communities. We're spending the resources anyway, it's just a question of where do you want to spend them, on the front end or all the way down the line. [Rochester]

We are seeing so many middle class kids who are still also not reaching the potential that they could. If we were strengthening the quality of the experiences they have, we would do a better job with that. [PI]

Many also believe that school readiness, using this broad definition, does not just apply to three and four year olds in formal education settings, but starts prenatally and at home with parents, who play an important role in nurturing and providing early learning opportunities to their children. In order for children to be ready for school, the family needs to be in a position to support their children's development.

Education starts at birth more than it does at kindergarten. Parents need to be able to understand what they can be doing with children, birth-K. [Glenwood]

You can't start when a child is four, and say, 'Now we are going to focus on school readiness.' It's all the things that happen before, that you're involved in. You have to start before. It's everything that you are doing from Day One, from the first day you find out you are pregnant. [Sauk Rapids]

[School readiness is] also about communities and making sure children at risk are protected from unhealthy and dysfunctional situations. [Twin Cities]

I think part of this school readiness really has to focus on the parents being ready. If the parents are ready and stable, then their children will benefit. Stability. [Bemidji]

I think it's about a continuum for those families who have high needs and are at risk. There needs to be more comprehensive and intensive services. Universal on one end and then more targeted on the other end. [Rochester]

It should be available for every family and every child, and it should be available in forms that meet their child's developmental needs, and not just one opportunity, one model, "This is all we have to offer you." [Duluth]

Schools must also be ready; they need adequate facilities and resources for children when they start school.

Also think of school readiness from the receiving end, are the schools ready? Facilities, resources, so I see it from the other side of the coin. [Twin Cities]

Terminology, we look at it as being the responsibility of the child, being "ready for school." Rather than schools also being ready to take the children where they are. [Duluth]

Differentiated instruction. The school being able to take each child exactly where they are when they come. [Twin Cities]

While most participants felt the broad definition of school readiness was an appropriate goal of early childhood care and education, some felt that the term "school readiness" can be detrimental to the overall development of children, and divide the efforts of early childhood advocates.

It seems like when we talk about healthy development, so much of it is directed towards school readiness, and not just healthy babies. I think it's difficult for parents and care-givers to get their head around, 'Well, I have to get this infant ready for school.' I don't think it is the correct terminology. [Sauk Rapids]

It's a phrase that is an artificial separator in the early childhood community that doesn't really need to be there. But because of those words, I think those words were coined by not the early childhood community but another business community. They sometimes have served to divide us in a way that doesn't need to be. When I talk to people one-on-one, they all agree that when we use the term *school readiness* it's a divider. [Duluth]

It isn't about school readiness; it's about healthy and age-appropriate development. [Rochester]

Strategies – strengths and gaps

Participants listed a number of early childhood care and education strategies that have been tried in Minnesota in the last five years. The figure below provides an overview of the different strategies mentioned across Minnesota, with their strengths and gaps. Many commented that, overall, the statewide strategies have been fragmented, under-funded, and weak and that local efforts have been successful at pulling the communities together on behalf of helping children reach their full potential. The strategies mentioned include numerous programs and initiatives for children, parent education programs, home visit programs, professional development for providers, preschool screenings, a quality rating system, and transition to kindergarten.

5. Early care and education strategies to achieve school readiness used in Minnesota in the last five years, their strengths and gaps

Strategy	Strengths	Gaps
Early care and education initiatives, programs, and services	<p>State mandate to provide opportunities</p> <p>Research supports early childhood care and education</p> <p>Increased consensus and cooperation</p> <p>Community driven efforts and collaborations</p>	<p>Agreement on what children need</p> <p>Consistent standards and license requirements</p> <p>Not following research-based programming</p> <p>Financial support</p> <p>Broader focus on children prenatally to kindergarten</p> <p>Infant care, and culturally- appropriate options</p> <p>Overall strategy</p> <p>Universal access</p> <p>Adequate physical facilities appropriate for young children</p> <p>Parents face barriers to access, e.g., financial means, transportation, knowledge and importance of ECE</p>
Parent education	<p>Positively impacts school readiness</p> <p>Increasing efforts</p>	<p>Funding, e.g., ECFE funds reduced</p> <p>Reaching non-English speaking, low-income, and young parents</p> <p>Stigma attached to ECFE</p>
Home visits	<p>Eases burden on parents (services come to them)</p> <p>Some support from K-12 partners</p>	<p>Expensive</p> <p>Been focused on parents of newborns</p>
Professional development for early care providers	<p>Statewide curriculum available</p> <p>Providers' potential to positively impact children's development</p> <p>Some support from businesses</p> <p>Providers' investment in children</p>	<p>Connecting with FFN and veteran providers</p> <p>Transportation to trainings</p> <p>Trainings focused on early childhood development rather than crafts</p> <p>Funding for trainings and curricula</p>
Preschool screenings	<p>Enables providers to know where children are at</p>	<p>Funding</p> <p>Parents don't bring children in, lack self-confidence</p>
Quality rating system	<p>Efforts to develop</p>	<p>Cultural competence</p>
Transition to kindergarten	<p>Increasing connection between early care providers and kindergarten teachers</p> <p>Interest in database to track preschool children</p>	<p>Level of involvement of K-12</p> <p>System for communicating between early care and K-12</p> <p>Resources and support for database to track children</p>

Overall strengths

Discussion participants said a big strength in their communities is the high level of commitment, dedication, and cooperation among early childhood care and education stakeholders in their region. Specifically, they noted the MIFs Early Childhood Initiative and local efforts of organizations to leverage funds together across organizations. Several communities also noted a high level of support from businesses and schools.

We have tremendous dedication by all the people who work in all of these programs, the agencies, schools, and some business people. The business people say, “We have to do this. We absolutely have to.” [Bemidji]

The fact that Early Childhood Family Education, many people here are original, focus on the family, and support, and the state just having the program – it’s a model across the nation. A definite strength. There has been more focus on the family, and not just the child. [Duluth]

In many communities, providers and families are very interested and enthusiastic about attending trainings and gaining additional education about early childhood care and education. This interest is a strength organizations can work with to increase awareness and knowledge of early childhood care and education and its importance.

One of the things we’ve done in our coalition recently is establish a website – we are trying to get out information for parents and professionals, and trying to heighten awareness of people, whether they are professionals in the field or whether they’re parents. [Duluth]

ECSE and the programming they brought in. We have been fortunate because of the people we work with here, and they have been providing specialized trainings for us. We have very good providers because they have been able to take advantage of the trainings. We try to get all the mandatory trainings at least once or twice a year. [Glenwood]

[Family, Friends, and Neighbors providers] are very eager to participate. [Bemidji]

[Parent education] has gotten more momentum going than it was 10 years ago. So there is a realization of that. [Sauk Rapids]

Some communities are trying new and innovative approaches to addressing some of the gaps in services. For example, they are taking early education curricula to providers’ homes or child care settings, visiting families in their homes, and developing systems to connect early childhood care and education providers with kindergarten teachers to ease the transition to school.

At White Earth we have an on-staff early childhood educator and she works directly with our child care providers and our centers on curriculum, professional development training, parent conferences, and assessment screenings. That is new to child care. She does monthly trainings and invites Head Start and community members and child welfare, and of course, our providers and parents. Then she will go right into the home and work on the environment, Ojibwe language. So I have two staff who are certified in a lot of different areas, so they have that layering. This has been very successful. [Walker]

Another strength in the beginning stages is more of a connection between child care and early childhood teachers for more of a collaborative. United Way has been supportive of that and made some opportunities available for providers and kindergarten teachers. They have had several events where they can talk about this. [Sauk Rapids]

City-wide is starting to increase family home visiting programs. There has been an increase in family partnership programs. There is the Metro Family Alliance which is increasing the family home visiting throughout the state. [Rochester]

Another strategy is linking with K-12. There are huge gaps; I don't think it's been successful, but that's something that has been initiated or started. Trying to have not only school-based early childhood programs, but community child care centers and family child care providers have a link or a connection to what is happening in the elementary school in their area. [Twin Cities]

For the professional development strategy, it's not workshops, it's coaching. Whether it's school teachers, family homes or centers, it is consistent weekly or bi-weekly coaching. [Twin Cities]

Overall gaps

Though communities value the state-funded early education programs, group discussion participants described an overall lack of strategic cooperation and coordination as a major gap, especially with regard to funding.

ECFE and Head Start are great programs; licensed child care have great programs, but bringing all those programs together so that everybody around the state can start to talk the same language. So we have, in a sense, been competing against each other for financial resources. [Duluth]

I don't think there has been a very good strategic vision at all in terms of coordinating the state funding of Head Start, ECFE, and School Readiness. [Worthington]

Another gap is that the available programs fail to reach all children for a number of reasons. First, programs and services lack the capacity to reach all children, either because of limited spaces, or they are unable to meet the needs of specific age groups, English language learners, or cultural populations.

We are missing out, where we live, on our Native populations, in Bemidji we are in the middle of three reservations. Meeting the needs of those children when they are going to school and prior to that. [Bemidji]

We need more preschool opportunities in our county. There are always kids who cannot get into preschool programs in this county. [Glenwood]

Trying to close the gap for communities like Worthington and other locales where there is a sizable ESL population. [Worthington]

The infant care issue is huge. The waiting lists are just out of control. [Northfield]

Certainly in Rice County the most marginalized populations economically are also generally not English speakers. Enormous barrier for those families to connect with existing resources. There are fabulous resources available, but there are many families who don't know about it because they can't get it in their own language. [Northfield]

We are missing the communities of color and English Language Learners. Children who are living in poverty, many of them in Minnesota are children of color and English Language Learners. [Twin Cities]

Sometimes you have a good program, and those needing it the most don't show up. How do we engage those parents? Especially for those of us who have a large Hispanic population? [Sauk Rapids]

Programs are also missing some children because parents face barriers to accessing the services and programs that are available. Some parents cannot afford for their children to attend high quality programs, or lack transportation to get their children to programs. Affordability is a problem, particularly for families who make too much income to qualify for subsidies, but not enough to afford programs on their own. In addition, those parents that receive subsidies lose benefits if they lose their jobs, and cannot afford programs on their own.

Parents need to be able to afford it. Kids are staying home because of affordability and transportation. In the rural community these are problems and issues. [Glenwood]

Parents with adequate income, they are making the choice not to send their children. Because they have just enough money, they don't qualify for government programs. [Glenwood]

Transportation. Families who don't have the economics to get there. But what about the families who work but still can't get off at 9 o'clock, or can't leave work to get their children to preschool? We can't forget about the people who can't afford it, but just can't do it. [Northfield]

I am hearing from my parents that they got laid off from their work. So it's not just the education part, it's the job part and the gas crisis. All of that is connected. They have to pick where their money goes. [Northfield]

Parents struggle with transportation. Transportation is a huge issue. Parents working and they have to shuffle their kids. Transportation is a difficult thing to coordinate. It may influence you on how you get your child to preschool. [Worthington]

It's a cost factor. Activities are additional for parents; they have to pick up the cost of those activities, even though ECFE might be putting them on. There's a lot of things there for families who can't put food on the table, let alone provide for their child's school readiness. [Walker]

Some parents do not take advantage of the many programs and services available because they do not understand the importance of early childhood care and education, or their priority is on meeting their basic needs.

Parents have too many other stressors – financial and others. They are trying to make it from day-to-day. It's just not a priority for them. Their priorities are more of a basic level. Addictions, etc. [Glenwood]

Folks living in poverty tend to live in the today and not in the future. Today is a priority. [Sauk Rapids]

Get them into parent programs and education. You want to be able to reach out and help, but it's hard to get them in. And parents feel that it might be touchy-feely. And they don't want that. It's a stigma. [Glenwood]

The weakness of [preschool screenings] is getting the information out there and to get the parents to bring their child in. What is happening is a lot of parents, particularly the children who we would ideally want to identify and have them get some additional assistance, parents say, "Oh, I won't send my child to preschool screening because they'll fail." And so then we don't see that child until after they turn 5. [Northfield]

[Parents] don't have the money or the skills to work enough or to manage their families. Sometimes they get so caught up in trying to manage their own life. Some of them go crisis to crisis and they can never get to thinking about two weeks down the road. [Glenwood]

Some parents may not know what to do, or what school readiness is. [Walker]

Another gap is the ability of providers to access professional development and training opportunities. Though opportunities are often available, not all providers can participate because of transportation, a larger challenge in rural areas. In addition, not all providers see the need for early education training, especially family, friend and neighbor, and

veteran providers. They may not see themselves as providers of early education or they feel what they are doing is adequate.

Family, Friends, and Neighbors providers don't always identify themselves as that. [Bemidji]

Lack of opportunities for training. You may have to travel quite a distance for the training. [Worthington]

There are some veteran daycare providers who have been doing this for a long time and they don't feel they want anyone to tell them how to do this. [Sauk Rapids]

Trying to reach out to our Family, Friends, and Neighbors and what we're about – they're kind of a disenfranchised group from all this conversation, even the conversation of readiness, but they are taking care of new children. [Northfield]

You get teachers who are still stuck in the old way of teaching Head Start kids. They think it's still more of a social program, trying to get the kids just to get along with each other, and not focusing on making sure they know how to write their name. That's kind of a weakness if you have teachers that have been in the program for a number of years, using the old way of thinking. [Walker]

The lack of adequate services and resources to address other community issues is another gap that affects school readiness. For example, children born into poverty or to teen mothers are less likely to be ready for kindergarten. Without addressing these issues in tandem with early childhood care and education, school readiness for all children cannot be achieved.

I want to also reiterate the poverty piece. I don't think we're going to get anywhere with this when we have an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. The poor percentages just keep rising. That has to be an on-going focus; what are we as a society going to do about that? [Rochester]

A gap in school readiness is prioritizing. We talk about kids from 0-5 or 0-8, but we leave out the teens, like teen pregnancy prevention. The evidence of improving outcomes in young children. It's a gap. We're not yet there in Minnesota. [Twin Cities]

I don't even understand why it's a question or why they cut the funding. I don't understand why we're not funding transportation, why does a parent have to decide – "I need to go to work in order to better my life and have a better life for my child. But I can't go to work because I don't have the money for child care. I don't have the transportation to get there." It's aggravating, and it should not be a question in Minnesota or in the United States. [Bemidji]

Finally, respondents from the rural groups felt there was a lack of input from rural voices. They noted that their communities face issues that the Metro area does not, and, as local providers, they have a unique perspective on what is going on in their community that should be considered when allocating resources.

Our problems are heightened and enhanced because of other things that aren't our problems from the Metro area. Transportation is a big one. [Glenwood]

Lots of decisions were being made for child care that providers were not ever asked about. They were all metro. Until they had the plan in place, then they went out and asked providers what they thought about it. We forget about the people who are actually doing the work. [Glenwood]

We are at a disadvantage. Because we are not Metro, we don't have the resources, so we usually have to come up with our own resources or drive miles and miles. It would have been nice to see how a rural MELF pilot site would survive or score. [Walker]

Roles and governance

Respondents provided some feedback on what role families and parents, early childhood local coalitions, the foundations, the state and federal governments, K-12, higher education, businesses, and local communities can play in reaching the goal of school readiness for all children. The respondents also provided some feedback on who might take the lead role in ensuring school readiness for all children in Minnesota.

Parents

Respondents indicated that parents have an important, if not the most important, role in their children's care and education. First, they must have an understanding of their role and nurture their children starting at birth. As their children age, they should engage with early care providers and educators. Parents can also play a role in connecting with legislators.

You have to have that involvement of their parents and a caring caregiver along the way to nurture them. Those are where the obstacles come into play. [Northfield]

The parents have a certain amount of responsibility. It's the parents who set up the first five years. The parents have to start this process and they have to do their job. [Glenwood]

Of vital importance is the role of the parents in all of this... the parents also need to be advocates for their kids. Whether that's, "Hey! I want my child to get the right education and get the right information to the kindergarten teacher so that they know what's going on." Or make that call to the legislators. [Northfield]

Early childhood professionals

Many discussion participants see their main role as coordinating among themselves, and working together, as a community, toward the same goal.

I think we can come up with a common mission, but I think we could do a better job of sorting out our roles. We all have separate roles, but be more efficient and effective, giving up some things. [Twin Cities]

Until you have some kind of common ground where you are all going to work for it, you'll continue to fight for your piece of the pie. [Worthington]

EC (early childhood) needs an organization and strategy like [the Minnesota Environmental Initiative]. [Twin Cities]

They also have a role of promoting public policy and communicating with stakeholders. As providers working directly with families, they have a unique perspective to offer stakeholders in terms of what works and what families' need.

Developing and proposing public policy is a big part of our role. [Determine] what changes we can make based on the information we have. [Twin Cities]

Communicate [program] successes to other people at the state level or at the foundations that might consider funding it. [Worthington]

We as the folks in the early childhood community working with the kids, working with the families, need to be the ones talking to folks at the foundations, folks as the stakeholders, folks in the school district about what you're seeing, what you're hearing, what's important, what do you need for support – they need to hear the facts from the folks who are working in early childhood, about what they see and what the kids are going to need, so they can give the kind of support that works. [Northfield]

We have also been bolder in our communities in advocating for young children. How many meetings were we at until midnight, fighting aggressively with administrators. [Bemidji]

Keep our policy makers informed of our needs and desires and what concerns us. Because they're the ones making the decisions. I feel it's my job to inform them. Not just the bad stuff, but also the good stuff. [Walker]

Finally, early childhood care and education providers and activists feel they have a role in educating and communicating with parents, to increase their involvement in their own children's early childhood care and education.

Getting the parents involved pushing them a little harder to do some of these things. [Worthington]

Get [parents] into parent programs and education. You want to be able to reach out and help, but it's hard to get them in. It's a stigma. We need to reduce the social stigmas. There shouldn't be any social stigma with ECFE. [Glenwood]

Folks who are caring for the kids need to be in communication with the parents. [Northfield]

Foundations

Respondents indicated foundations should play the role of leaders, funders, coordinators, and analysts. As leaders, they would band together to increase government support for early care and education. As funders, they should continue to fund early childhood care and education initiatives, perhaps in partnership with the state. Financial support from foundations is particularly important given that state funding changes with different administrations. Many respondents also stressed the need for long-term funding rather than programmatic funding that lasts only a few years. Funding innovation continues to be important, especially since the government is less apt to fund new or innovation approaches.

Foundations could play a role coordinating statewide early childhood care and education efforts. Instead of each foundation funding certain programs, the foundations could work together to fund a community. The foundations can also provide leadership in the field by setting an overall vision, developing outcomes, and supporting best practices.

I think I am very encouraged by the fact that several foundations have long been meeting together and more of them are now investing in the development of a "strategic vision." I would hope that this vision integrates what we've learned from the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation about the most cost effective programs and what works best. [PI]

Coordination among the foundations, as is happening through this business plan. Think how much better it could be without these piecemeal, contradictory approaches. [Twin Cities]

This is where I would like to suggest state-wide foundation. It would be nice if [the Minnesota foundations] could all come together and they go outside their stated missions. All these strong foundations [could] pool a little bit of their resources to make a collective decision that they would fund to try to make a difference. Perhaps all those foundations together could say, "If we want to look out for Minnesota's bigger picture, pool our resources." At least for one project. [Worthington]

I think funding things to focus on geographic areas vs. program would be more helpful – so that we could collectively get everyone pulling in the same direction with the resources that are already there and with what we bring to the table. [PI]

They should think of doing matching funds with [the state] because we can make the pot bigger. And we can say, as part of the incentives, you only get that money if you are moving up the quality ladder. [PI]

Give them [programs] funds but also give them the assurance that it's going to be there. Give them some sort of a commitment so that they know that if they put all of this time and effort, like this group did for years of planning, but now it's paid off because they know they had at least 10 years where they don't have to worry about funding. They can just focus on the programming, kids, and the families. [Duluth]

Foundations can also play the role of analysts and researchers, finding best practices in early childhood care and education. Some respondents also noted that foundations are in a good position to provide capacity building to providers and communities on how best to meet the needs of families effectively.

If the foundations had a set of outcomes, that would be terrific. [Glenwood]

It would be helpful for them to be pretty clear about how to increase the quality in care and education settings. In the absence of the State doing it right now, they could systematically help the programs that are helping providers increase their quality. [PI]

[Foundation are in a wonderful position to help] us build the capacity we need to meet the needs, and we need to do that locally. [Duluth]

A good role for [funders] is infrastructure – professional development, research. [Twin Cities]

Finally, as leaders, foundation can play a role in communicating with parents and policymakers about the importance of early childhood care and education. Through marketing or public awareness campaigns, they should provide information to help parents understand what is best for their child, and shape public policy.

Marketing. If you are a parent, you want to do what's best for your child. Here's where to go and find out how to do the best for your child. [Glenwood]

One thing we very often do is slide into talking about the 3-yrs-old and up. Birth- to-3 programming and needs are incredibly interdisciplinary, [and] very much connected to parents. It's all about partnering with parents. [Foundations can] encourage and support the kind of work. [Sauk Rapids]

They are being willing to speak up on these issues and be willing to highlight how important this is. Willing to publicly speak up can help provide the support we need to move to the next level legislatively. [PI]

The foundations role [is to] speak the truth, tell it like it is. [Be a] bridge between government and business. Speak up [and say,] “This is our state. We want early childhood. Use relationships at the highest level. Involve the board members to twist some arms. [Twin Cities]

Government

The state and federal governments are accountable to the taxpayers, so it is important they fairly and responsibly spend public dollars. However, the state, in particular, is also responsible for ensuring quality education to children, and many of the participants believe the state must make early childhood care and education a higher priority as part of their education responsibilities. Many participants feel the state should fund early childhood care and education at the same level as K-12 education.

The state’s role, whether it’s the Governor or the state legislature, whatever body, needs to recognize and fund and support at appropriate levels, equal access to school readiness for all residents of the state. [Northfield]

I’m not suggesting that it needs to be part of the traditional K-12 system, it just needs to get the same resources. We don’t fund elementary as we do high school, but it’s pretty close. But when you compare what we do for early childhood programs, it’s pretty embarrassing. [Duluth]

There is a huge role for government in funding things like TEACH and RETAIN, professional development opportunities, and not encouraging the market to keep a low price. Encouraging the market to charge as universities and colleges do, what it costs to educate kids and then figure out how you scholarship kids. [Twin Cities]

When considering early childhood care and education programs and how to fund them, participants felt the state should adopt a more inclusive view that integrates all aspects of a well-rounded child.

Having an educational definition as we have defined it of school readiness, and it’s not just, “ABCs and 1-2-3s”, it’s that broader definition. [Northfield]

Assuring that health and public health is part of [the early childhood] conversation. [Twin Cities]

Higher education

Higher education can play a role in reaching the school readiness goal by educating upcoming professionals, conducting research, and developing best practices. The discussion in Northfield, which included several members of the higher education community, described some specific roles they could play.

I think it is our role to support, promote and share the resources and be an entity that sells the message or sends the message in the community.

Being able to collaborate on training, conferences, and professional development. We should all be doing this together. Help promote the very best practices. Our students are ultimately going to become the next generation of [providers] – our job is to stay ahead of this and then constantly give them the very best models available.

Being the convener, [of] a civic engagement seminar. It's a very exciting potential to have higher education involved in that way.

The universities have important roles. We have done some good group work through CEED at the U. They have provided some good support to us. They also know an awful lot of what is appropriate, and while some may have strong feelings about what is the best strategy, I think if they can help us make sure that we are having a rating system that is appropriate, that we are funding things based on the evidence, that is what we need, in terms of technical assistance in that way. [PI]

Business community

The business community should invest in early care and education so their employees have safe, quality care options during their work hours. Many pointed out that employers should have vested interested in early childhood care and education because it impacts the workforce, both the working parents of today, as well as the future employees.

Big business and the big CEOs need to understand that if they don't invest, they won't have the workers for the future. [Bemidji]

[Business] should invest because they need to think about today's workforce and tomorrow's workforce. Today's workforce is if you're family-friendly, then your employees, when they're there, aren't distracted; they like you, and they do a better job for you and a better job at home. Tomorrow's workforce is if kids don't arrive at school ready to learn then they won't be at grade level at 3rd grade, they're less likely to graduate from high school, and you won't have your workers that you need, because they are going to need post-secondary education. [Rochester]

People can't care for their infants, and yet this becomes an employer issue. How one encourages investment for employers to become more affected. [Northfield]

There are a whole range of things employers can do, even if it's down to having an appreciation for the issues and pressures that employees may be feeling with child care. Employer responses will vary with who they are and what resources they have available to them. At least having an appreciation for the issues and pressure it creates, as well as the opportunities. So that's on the ground level. [Twin Cities]

K-12 education system

The K-12 education community has a role, especially in the transition to kindergarten, but also in being involved with early childhood care and education so when student reach the K-12 system they are prepared, healthy, and able to be successful.

To get early childhood on the radar screen, the principals and the superintendents still have not met the challenge. They have much more immediate things they are doing. We have made some progress, but I sure would like to see more. [Northfield]

My point was making it a mandatory connection to the public education system. Because then you have universal access and comprehensive services supported by public funds. [Rochester]

The thing that schools do own and need to become much more actively engaged in is transition. That is what [the schools] should own. It's our responsibility and it's what Higher Ed does well. You spend week-long orientations at colleges in the fall. They're designed to retain students. We need some retooling and restructuring at what is our role in the early childhood world. It has to come from the top, from the school board level, fully embracing their role as early childhood, that it is a Pre-K -12 or E-12 or E-16 system. We need to look carefully at what we expect of children and families and how people can be successful in entering our system. [Twin Cities]

Community's role

Finally, other community members also play a role in reaching the goals of early childhood care and education. The medical community could promote good early care and education practices, and screenings as part of well-child visits. The faith community and community members at-large can be involved in supporting families in other ways, so families can make school readiness a priority.

I wish that more people from the faith community and men were involved. As we think of early childhood, as a society it is more a women's issue. In our society, men seem to have more financial power. I wish that men would be more interested in early childhood. [Glenwood]

A lot of onus on local communities. But they are not coming to the table. Citizens, parents, professionals, all have responsibilities. [Sauk Rapids]

Ultimately, public will has to decide it's a value that they're going to support. [Rochester]

Early childhood piece is the key to the success of the community. I believe all of learning is successful because I want the senior community looking at how we can improve our community, which means they will support early childhood, as well as they'll support things benefitting them. [Bemidji]

Lead role

With many entities working toward a goal of school readiness, though sometimes with different understandings of what that means, participants indicated that early childhood care and education efforts have been very disorganized and uncoordinated for years. Not only are different entities and agencies working to address quality care and education, the individual programs and outcomes often change with each change in leadership. To address this discontinuity, participants would like to see an organization taking the lead in coordinating early childhood care and education efforts and resources across the state. Some see this as being an office at the state, while others suggest a public-private partnership.

I think there should be an office in the State that takes the lead on that and has some power, authority, and money to do that well. Or otherwise everything gets watered down. You give a little money here this year, and then a little money there, and then, “Oh, we found a gap, let’s try to fund that gap up.” And there is never any sense of integrity to it. [Sauk Rapids]

It has to be a shared leadership. Depending on political factors, you need to come to an agreement in order to move forward. [Twin Cities]

An Office of Early Learning could make a difference because we need to get things that relate to families with real young kids out of being in this fragmented approach where it is in different agencies. [PI]

For the public part of it, there should be one government or semi-government entity. I could imagine a public-private partnership being that entity. One place that we can all turn to and say, “These people, along with the governor and the legislature, are responsible for improving the school readiness of our state.” [PI]

I really am skeptical that a state agency could be that coordinating board, but I think an outside entity that has the ear of the business community, that has the ear of the foundations, would then have the ear of the legislature and would also listen. [Northfield]

Though a state entity or public-private partnership could provide statewide leadership around early childhood care and education, participants felt that communities should be empowered and funded to develop local strategies. This would enable communities to meet the needs specific to the families in their area and encourage collaboration.

Looking at whatever kinds of services we put together, we have to look at it by community and be able to do what works. If we know what our end goals and outcomes are, how we can achieve it as a community. If all the kids are ready by the time they get out of school or by the time they’re Ready for Life, and we’re doing it one way in Virginia and different in Hermantown and different in Two Harbors, they’re all coming out the same. [Duluth]

The State has to make it a priority, but maybe it needs to be done at the local level. I like the idea of local ownership and local dollars. The idea of meeting local needs. I think that when you talk about, who is in charge of this? I think it starts locally. [Worthington]

Resources and sustainability

Participants described a number of challenges and opportunities to providing early childhood care and education in Minnesota.

Challenges

At the state level, the challenges include the different categories of funding housed within different departments, department leadership changes with elected officials, and legislation requirements limiting what entities can do. Local organizations and agencies often compete for the same sources of funding, or can only use funding for very specific purposes, so there is little incentive to collaborate.

Part of that problem is that, depending on the political whims of the time, [the state's] priorities change. [Northfield]

Part of it is territory; not being willing to take the piece of the pie each entity is responsible for. Both bodies of the legislature; we also have the Federal government. [Twin Cities]

The biggest difficulties created by categorical funding are some of the challenges. I think what seems to me to be the ongoing policy fight between child care and education. [PI]

We have too many initiatives. Public health has their initiative around young children. We can try to pull everybody together, but the money sits in so many different places. But it's all the same kids. [Sauk Rapids]

We are all receiving from a gazillion pots and people are protecting the pots. Where is that central source of money? To me, it always stems back, because it's coming out of so many pots. [Northfield]

Part of it is funding, specific funding and mandates so that people say, "I can't do what you want to do, because this money is earmarked and targeted to certain populations." [Rochester]

Local programs often have to face difficult choices about what to fund: programs, awareness, screening, professional development, or other equally important items. Additionally, funding often only lasts a limited amount of time, or requires significant administrative time to manage.

One of the difficulties with that is that when you go after the foundation money, it comes and goes a lot. Programs get up and running, and there is no basis in reality. That is very hard. We just recently had examples where we had excellent programs that are across the board really solid, but the funding did not continue. [Sauk Rapids]

It is a financial hardship. It's hard on a group to provide money for staff or both, for parenting education and preschool education. [Sauk Rapids]

We have internal child health dollars, home visiting dollars, and these are for separate groups. Requirements for [reporting/recording]. One of the messages will be if there is anything you can do, you can spend just so much time handling administratively. [Glenwood]

When the money runs out, the programs cease to exist. You have to keep providing. [Walker]

A few of the groups felt that a main challenge to providing high quality programs is the inadequate number of trained professionals. Licensing requirements are minimal, and providers have no financial incentive to obtain additional education and knowledge, or be accredited. In fact, those with higher education in early childhood development can often make more in other positions and choose not to work in the early childhood care and education.

I could tell parents that I have a doctorate in early childhood education, and I'm going to charge \$300, but they don't care. There is no reward system in our profession for having education. [Northfield]

There is the gap between what assistance pays and what you charge and what the parents [are able to] pay. [Northfield]

If we want to have quality indicators for programs, and if we want to have the best qualified teachers, then we need to work towards having more programs with more 4-year degreed teachers in early childhood education. Every year more of my students desperately want to work with preschool but they can't afford it because of the salary levels, so they look for elementary [school] jobs. [Bemidji]

To keep quality people in there, we have to pay them quality dollars. They are impacting lives and changing lives. They can make more at McDonalds. That's the reality; it's all about money and dollars and keeping quality people. They are doing a vital job with our children. If you want good people, you have to pay them. A lot of good people leave the field because they need to make more money to support their own family and provide their own financial piece. [Walker]

A hairdresser has to go through 150 hours of training before they can cut someone's hair. Why is there not a set number of hours for providers? [Walker]

In nearly every group discussion, participants described early childhood as a low priority – in the Tribes; in the state departments of education, health, and human services; in school districts, and in the legislature. Awareness about the importance of early care and education has not translated to early care and education moving to the top of the funding list.

We need a President, a Governor, a Legislature, we need a School Board. Those people all get elected by the local citizenry. It isn't a priority for us to say, "As a community we need to have a well-informed and successful citizenry." Those who vote, how does this affect us? How do they know how it affects us? If we were to identify this as the one priority that all of us are sharing, then we would have something to communicate with community members about. It would be something we could articulate to legislators about very clearly. [Bemidji]

For example, in Connecticut and Kentucky when the Governor is a champion of early childhood, funding is restored, initiatives move forward and you start looking at the system in a very different way. Regardless of where we are sitting, the future governors, early childhood has to become a top priority and then things get done. [Northfield]

I worry about the public will. The public does not see school readiness as a priority. All these groups see it at the top, but legislators aren't hearing that from their constituents. [Twin Cities]

All of the policy people should have an understanding of what they're doing. We invite our tribal council to our child care meetings all the time, but they never come. We know they're busy. But it's also not a priority. [Walker]

It's what makes our culture, the American and United States culture, different from China. Compare those two and you have children in China who are very able to excel. Who sets those standards in a nation that is almost considered a third world? Sometimes I can't grasp that. Yet, I know there is a valuing of the family. Children are the priority. [Twin Cities]

Opportunities

To resolve the challenges associated with earmarked funding and funding housed within different departments, participants suggested erasing lines between funding, and focusing money on families across all their needs rather than pockets of funding for specific needs. As many said, money should "follow the child" regardless of the need, rather than be earmarked for specific types of programs.

What we need to do is to erase the lines between the different funding pieces. These are the needs of this child and this family. How are we going to meet these needs without having 13 people on a conference call? [Sauk Rapids]

I think one thing to move us forward is to be bold, let go of territory, look at how existing funding can be used in different ways. [Twin Cities]

If the legislators put the money in one pot and let us figure out how to work it out collaboratively. Because of how the money is funneled, it forces that turf-protecting. [Duluth]

One of the reasons I like [de-categorized funding] is because it allows for differences in communities. There is a certain ‘working together’ and you do address different populations, one immigrant group or another. There needs to be that room to flex to meet the needs. That’s why I like systems that give a certain amount of control to local or regional level. [Rochester]

Participants also see an opportunity for a quality rating system or set of standards. This would enable better pay for providers with increased education and establish a system of accountability that is consistent across communities. Standards and criteria should be clear, consistent across time, research-based, and supported with adequate resources. Legislators would like to see a standards-based early care and education framework that, over time, would link funding to the quality standards.

Give us some standards that really apply – I want standards that are reasonable and that fit with children and teachers. Teachers grow just as children grow. They don’t all start at an awesome level. [Sauk Rapids]

There should be standards that apply to anyone receiving any State money, about what kinds of services they provide for kids and families...The system can develop based on community needs and the best kind of model for the community, so it doesn’t always look the same in every community, but it is still held to the same set of standards. [PI]

It is important that we have educators in early childhood who are licensed. An evaluation that proves you have this outcome on the child, I think that does not work. We need to think about that. So, high standards, good financial support, and evaluations that help you do a better job rather than an evaluation that “passed or failed.” [Sauk Rapids]

One of the things I’ve been very excited about is the development of the Parent Aware rating system. It would give the parents a basis for choosing child care on how their rating is. I would like to see that expanded a lot. [Bemidji]

The other piece to keep in mind is that an awful lot of this is private. Child care and preschool are mostly private expenditure, not a public expenditure. So then the whole movement towards trying to have some quality standards – what we’re doing is not there yet. [Rochester]

With a quality rating system, they know what they’re expecting at each school. The parents want their children to go – the taxpayer dollars are directed to those. [Rochester]

What we see over and over is groups going to the legislature with 24 or 25 ideas about what we should do. It doesn't work legislatively. That's part of the reason why I think the new commitment to use the quality rating system is the framework so that we do have standards. So if we can get people to the point that they are willing to actually see that the allowances can end up being great incentives to helping us increase the quality on the higher end, we could get agreement with the Governor on that – that we are funding things based on the evidence, that is what we need. [PI]

Finally, some see an opportunity to develop an overall infrastructure to support young children and their families, perhaps similar to the higher education system.

We have got to have an independent initiative that assigns accountability, responsibility, and measurement within government, to be a big part of this. Something much more serious and significant than we have right now. [PI]

I have written a lot about this. Systems work where you have a system of quality providers already in place. You're choosing between this great program and this great program. And the programs are actually there and developed. The Scholarship Model needs to come in about 10 or 15 years, after we have developed the infrastructure and after we have a quality rating system in place with resources behind it, so that we can develop that network. Until that network is there the Scholarship Program is just somebody's political idea of the way to address the problem. [Bemidji]

I think that the early care and education system should be organized and managed in a way that is comparable to higher education, with a few exceptions. The financing for the system should be like higher education, in the sense of some money should go directly to families to enable them to purchase quality early childcare or early learning, and some money should go to the programs to deliver the services. We ought to organize it around a system built on quality, too. That is to say that everybody who touches the life of a child should have quality and an understanding of what the children need in the forefront. So it ought to be a quality-based, resource-rich system that funds both institutions and families directly. [PI]

Sustainable funding

Participants had various opinions about permanent funding and sources of new funding for early childhood care and education. Some felt that there should be a constitutional amendment that guarantees education for children under 5, in the same way that K-12 education is mandated, or that funding for early childhood care and education should be protected from changing legislative priorities. Others felt that the funding should be part of an "open legislative process." Regardless of whether participants felt funding should be made permanent, there was strong agreement about the need for increased and sustainable sources of funding.

The other huge business about K-12 is that you have a constitutional amendment. In the Minnesota Constitution, there will be free education. We don't. Early childhood is not in the Constitution. [Twin Cities]

Have a constitutional amendment to guarantee spending, like K-12. [Twin Cities]

Yes, I think there should be permanent funding. This implies that there be a particular funding source that cannot be altered by changed legislative priorities. [PI]

There needs to be permanent funding to be getting there, because otherwise no one is going to change anything. [PI]

Lowering the age of mandatory education. Lowering to 5, decrease to the age of 3. Mandatory education programs. [Rochester]

No permanent funding. It should be part of an open legislative process. The legislature needs courage and to stop looking for the silver bullets. We simply have to look at the need and fund it accordingly and adequately. [Twin Cities]

Some suggested reallocating funding from the education and human service systems to early childhood care and education. For example, spending more money for initiatives and programs for young children would reduce the amount that is necessary for children/adolescents later in life.

Quality early childhood investment means less dependence on the welfare system. It's going to take time for that to all catch up. We can't switch it all overnight. But eventually, if we start investing on the front end, we are not going to have to owe that money. [Northfield]

It is better to put money in preschool than all-day kindergarten. [Sauk Rapids]

We're spending the resources anyway, it's just a question of where do you want to spend them, on the front end or all the way down the line. [Rochester]

Participants offered some options for new revenue streams, such as a new sales tax on clothing, creating an early childhood care and education endowment, redirecting lottery funds, early childhood dedicated license plates, or redirecting the state's economic development money to early childhood care and education.

We have to be willing to do a revenue increase of some type. There are some that have talked about modifying the sales tax. I know that there is a thought about doing some sort of endowment, and if there was a way to create that, that would be great. [PI]

Other states have early childhood license plates that fund early childhood programs. We should have that, too. [Bemidji]

Dedicating the proceeds of the sales tax on clothing, which we do not currently tag, and dedicating that to early childhood and education. If it had a refundable tax credit, it could be fairly progressive. [PI]

Half of the state's economic development budget should be redirected to early childhood. Currently they provide subsidies to businesses. In a free market world, we wouldn't be doing any subsidies. I would say, cut current subsidies to business for economic development and redirect that money to early childhood development. [PI]

Have a constitutional amendment to guarantee spending, like K-12. [Twin Cities]

Participants also agreed that funding should be more tied to quality.

That's what those "fancy" MELF pilots are trying to find out. If you bring in new money, then focus on quality. [Twin Cities]

We should be giving higher subsidies to those or reimbursement rates that are actually moving towards what the research shows. [PI]

Appendix

Partnerships

Associations

Organizations

Programs

References

This list and brief descriptions of early care and education related partnerships, associations, organizations, and programs is a work in progress. The authors apologize for any errors and omissions. Please send corrections and additions to rick@wilder.org.

Partnerships

Early learning

The Build Initiative is a multi-state partnership that helps states construct a coordinated system of programs, policies, and services that responds to the needs of young children and their families. It does this by supporting those who set policies, provide services, and advocate for children from birth through age five so that our youngest children are safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed in school. The Build Initiative was created by the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative (ECFC), a consortium of national and local foundations that have substantial grant-making programs in early childhood care and education. Minnesota is one of five participating states. Ready 4 K is the Build grantee and coordinator in Minnesota.

Child Care WORKS is a coalition of parents, caregivers, and children's advocates that is dedicated to achieving high-quality, affordable and accessible child care for every Minnesota family. One of their main projects is the Child Care Leadership, Education and Mobilization project which involves grassroots activity to create relationships with every legislator in Minnesota.

Early Childhood Caucus is a bipartisan interest group open to House and Senate members supportive of quality early childhood care and education for all Minnesota children. The purpose of the caucus is to influence and shape public policies that impact Minnesota's youngest children, their families and caregivers. The caucus seeks to inform legislators, create dialogue, build consensus, and provide direction for legislative action.

Early Childhood Funder's Network is a group of about 20 Minnesota funders that share a commitment to increasing support and opportunities for the youngest Minnesotans and their families. The network has developed a shared vision for increasing private support for young children, but does not act as a funding pool.

The Early Childhood Research Collaborative (ECRC) – The Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis are teaming up to enhance multidisciplinary research on high-profile policy discussions on early childhood development. The Early Childhood Research Collaborative (ECRC) is a unique partnership that brings together prominent researchers and faculty members in a variety of disciplines at the university with

economists at the Federal Reserve to develop and synthesize research on cost-effective investments in early childhood. Co-directed by Arthur Reynolds, Professor of Child Development and Fellow of the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), and Art Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, the ECRC is funded in part by University President Robert Bruininks' Interdisciplinary Academic Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families.

First Steps is a community-wide public-private school readiness initiative spearheaded by the Rochester Area Foundation to assure that all children are ready for school when they enter kindergarten. Key partners include Rochester Area Foundation, Child Care Resource and Referral, Head Start, Family Action Collaborative (FACES), Olmsted County Public Health, Olmsted County Community Services, Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce, Rochester Public Schools, and United Way of Olmsted County. First Steps goals include to increase community awareness about school readiness, to improve the quality of early care and education in all settings, and to develop local capacity to measure children's progress towards school readiness and system performance. The First Steps Business Alliance is promoting and offering early literacy workshops for parents and FFN caregivers through employers.

Healthy Start is a network of Anoka County community partners that work with families to help them reach their full potential.

Invest Early is a comprehensive early childhood collaborative for low-income and at-risk children age 5 and younger and their families in Itasca County, Minnesota, that provides Head Start quality classrooms for more than 250 3- and 4-year olds using an innovative blending of public funding streams bolstered with foundation dollars. Partners include the Blandin Foundation, Head Start, and the four school districts in the county. Invest Early also offers participating families a menu of support services they can choose based on their needs or interests. The choices include family development classes, home visits, adult basic education classes, mental health support, and transportation. Invest Early also works in partnership with Itasca Community College and Bemidji State University to enable all those interested in working in early childhood to pursue a career ladder of training that will result in Early Childhood teacher licensure.

Itasca Project – The Itasca Project is an alliance of over 40 top corporate, nonprofit, and civic leaders from in the Twin Cities that focuses on initiatives that will ensure the region's future economic competitiveness and high quality of life. Early childhood education is one of its initiatives. In 2005, the Itasca Project provided the Governor a pro-bono consulting team to examine the current programs, develop a common fact base, and identify opportunities for improvement in early childhood education. The outcome

of the study was the basis of the Governor's legislative agenda, which included the creation of MELF.

Minnesota Business for Early Learning (MnBEL) is a 200-member organization of CEO's, senior executives, and business leaders representing more than 100 companies and organizations focused on the role of business in the early learning and school readiness of pre-kindergarten children. MnBEL emphasizes awareness around an array of early learning issues, identifies and promotes best practices in the workplace, and impacts public policy. MnBEL has recognized a "Child-Friendly Employer of the Year" since 2004.

Minnesota Business Partnership is a non-partisan organization comprised of more than 110 chief officers of Minnesota companies that works to preserve a high quality of life for Minnesotans by reaching out to elected officials and community organizations and sharing information on a number of policy areas. Around early childhood education, the focus is primarily on creating affordable access to quality education for Minnesota's low-income families. The Partnership actively supports MELF's efforts to identify successful early learning strategies through a series of pilot programs.

The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative, a joint venture of the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs), has established 75 local early childhood initiatives with funding from The McKnight Foundation. MIF initiatives have formed coalitions in over 165 greater Minnesota communities that have implemented more than 400 projects, programs, and activities centered on five key components of a nurturing community – strong families, engaged community members, effective and coordinated early care and education, early learning opportunities, and ready schools.

Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) is testing cost-effective strategies for improving school readiness, including pilots of Parent Aware (a quality rating and improvement system for early childhood programs and an information source for consumers) and the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program (the Rolnick and Grunewald model). Among the accomplishments of MELF that provide a foundation for further research and accountability mechanisms are: 1) a taxonomy of effective early childhood programs, 2) a conceptual framework or logic model for MELF underlying all of its projects, and 3) a measurement model with recommended measures of child development. At start-up in 2005, the MELF returned \$1 million in state money and is raising \$30 million in private funds.

The Minnesota Head Start State Collaboration Office integrates the lessons learned from Head Start and the services of local Head Start programs with state efforts in early childhood education and child care. The state office works to establish collaborative initiatives at the state and local levels, as well as at the federal level between state offices.

The state office also provides technical assistance and resources to local Head Starts and funds the Minnesota Head Start Association.

Minnesota Thrive Initiative is a pilot effort within the six MIF regions to promote healthy emotional and social development in young children, especially those in the highest need. The Thrive Initiative creates networks of local services and resources that help to ensure young children are ready for kindergarten and school success. These services include: capacity building, training, outreach, program development, and funding. Over the course of three years, the MIFs will provide each pilot site with a combination of technical assistance, training and financial resources to establish a local coalition that will work to design and implement a local system that supports the healthy social and emotional development of young children.

Family support

Affirmative Options Coalition is a network of over 50 member organizations that advocate for public policy change at the intersection of welfare and work. The coalition's goal is to promote policies that eliminate barriers and provide opportunities for low-income families to achieve economic security.

Caring for Kids Initiative is a partnership among Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners, Kids' Care Connection Early Learning Center, and the Wayzata School District Family Learning Center. The Initiative is working to develop a community-wide model that makes early childhood education, parent education, and family support accessible to all families. The Initiative provides scholarships for eligible low-income families in the Wayzata School District to access quality child care/early education programs. Caring for Kids wants every child to get a good start in life and for the community to know that everyone benefits when they do.

Children, Youth and Family Consortium (CYFC) is the leader for the University of Minnesota's President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. They serve as a conduit to information and resources and integrate research, teaching, policy and community practice. Their early childhood section specifically addresses individual, family, and community factors that influence the development and well-being of children through the first five years of life. CYFC builds networks by connecting people within the community and the University with each other and with resources to enhance their mutual work.

Council on Civic Parent Leadership, formed through the merger of the Minnesota Parenting Association and the Council for Parent Leadership, believes that all parents are civic leaders and have the power to improve the quality of life within and beyond their

families. Recently, the council planned parent engagement strategies with Ready 4 K staff to increase parent involvement in ECFE, Head Start, and MELF.

The Metro Alliance for Healthy Families is replicating the Dakota Healthy Families targeted home visiting model to first-time parents in the 7-county Twin Cities metro area through a Joint Powers Agreement among the seven county boards and the city council of Bloomington, which specifies 12 essential elements for quality consistent program replication, and evaluation performance and outcome measures.

Working with three local hospitals, the Alliance identifies at-risk mothers, and provides support service through weekly home visits in order to prevent child maltreatment and cognitive development. The program offers families a continuum of services including: emotional support, developmental guidance, advocacy, parent-child observation, therapeutic services, and access to community resources. The Metro Alliance is currently promoting a statewide targeted home visiting coalition.

Minnesota Children's Platform Coalition began in Arkansas and has grown to become active in 13 states, including Minnesota. This coalition promotes policies and politicians that support children and families. They are primarily focused on public support of equal access to affordable, comprehensive health care, early childhood education, violence prevention, and helping children in poverty and children with incarcerated parents. Their strategies include: educating candidates and policy makers; educating the public through outreach; networking with child advocates in local communities; disseminating resources and data on the status of children in specific states; partnering with state and local advocacy groups and organizations to build coordinated efforts around children and youth; encouraging citizens to vote for candidates who support greater investments in children and families; and hosting forums with presidential candidates on issues about children and families. In 2007, they published a report titled "Homeland Insecurity: American Children at Risk," which built a case for a \$500 billion a year invest-in-kids package. This report was distributed directly to leaders and broadly to the public through media coverage.

Minnesota Children's Trust Fund, administered within DHS, awards grants to agencies that are working to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect and promote protective factors to strengthen and support families. Their grants are specifically awarded to programs that are striving to nurture parent-child attachment, educate parents on child development, increase parent coping skills, build social networks for parents, and offer basic needs to families. In 2007, \$4.5 million in total grant money was disbursed across 16 agencies. They also partner with local Child Abuse Prevention Councils to maintain a community-based prevention focus.

Parents United for Public Schools is an organization that helps parents and community members to understand issues around their children's education including: accountability, school funding, myths vs. reality, and Minnesota rankings. They also provide resources to help others learn how to advocate, organize, and communicate with policy makers.

Health and mental health

Foundations for Success is a network of mental health services in Ramsey County with more than 100 community partners, offering mental health services that were previously unavailable or in short supply for young children prenatal through age five. Services represent the full continuum of care including prevention, early identification and intensive treatment. More than 10,000 Ramsey County children a year, for a total of up to 50,000 children, will be screened and receive opportunities for early intervention where needed. This new system of early childhood mental health care also provides training for early education professionals.

Interfaith Children's Advocacy Network (formerly Congregations Concerned for Children) of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition brings together people of faith in Minnesota to advance issues of children's health care, child care and early education, and a healthy home environment. The Network collaborates with other advocacy organizations to influence Minnesota policy makers to promote policies that benefit young children and reduce harms of child poverty, and trains and provides diverse faith communities with resources and materials to do legislative advocacy.

The Maternal and Child Health Advisory Task Force is a group of representatives from public and private health agencies in Minnesota that advises the Commissioner of Health on issues related and child and/or maternal health. The advice is generally offered through an annual report to the Commissioner of Health about activities, projects, and concerns around child and maternal health, but targeted reports can also be requested.

Minnesota Child Health Improvement Partnership consists of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Minnesota Departments of Health and Human Services, pediatric health care professionals, and families working to improve the quality of health care for Minnesota's children, youth, and adolescents and to assure optimal family-centered pediatric clinical practice.

Special needs

Minnesota State Interagency Coordination (MnSIC) is a system planning initiative that assists local school boards and county boards in establishing a coordinated service system for children with disabilities, ages 3-21, and their families. The MnSIC initiative brings together seven state public agencies to make needed policy changes so that a

coordinated service system is developed. The goal of improving and delivering coordinated services to children and youth with disabilities and their families is accomplished through reduction of duplication of planning efforts and improved response to family and child/youth needs.

Associations

Early learning

Alliance for Early Childhood Professionals engages in research, education, and systems change to increase the quality of child care that respects and honors diverse cultures. The Alliance advocates for and supports child development professionals in order to create a quality, culturally sensitive early care and education for Minnesota's children. It also aims to recognize and value the work of early childhood, and improve compensation for a diverse child development workforce. Cultural-specific early childhood groups through the Alliance include: Dakota Ojibwe Language Revitalization Alliance; Wicoie Nandagikendan Urban Immersion Preschools; Somali Children's Screening Project; and Leaders Circles.

American Academy of Pediatrics, Minnesota's branch, provides a forum for its 822 members to talk to their legislators on issues that matter to them. In 2004, they worked with Ready 4 K to create public awareness and e-advocacy efforts to assist advocates in communicating their early childhood message to elected officials. In 2008, they have a legislative policy position that supports access to early childhood education.

Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC), an affiliate of the National Association of the Education of Young Children, consists of over 1,500 child care professionals. The organization promotes provider support for those involved in the care of young children. They created a state-wide collaborative provider support program that includes more than 600 child care providers and administrators; and began the Accreditation Facilitation Project to help child care centers, homes, and schools obtain national accreditation. They also formed the Umbrella Strategic Alliance, which involved the Minnesota Licensed Family Child Care Association, the Minnesota School Age Care Alliance, and the Alliance for Early Child Professionals.

Minnesota Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators seeks to increase professional development around educational issues and to advocate for improvements in early childhood teacher education. MAECTE provides a forum for discussion and concerns of early childhood education interests, and offers a network for early childhood teacher educators in Minnesota and the surrounding region. The association collaborates with other organizations, including MnAEYC, to promote early childhood teacher

education. In addition, the association reviewed and supported the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress.

Minnesota Child Care Association represents child care centers throughout Minnesota and speaks on their behalf on issues in the industry. They operate as a conduit between child care agencies and state and national policy makers. Recent issues have included lobbying for child care centers to be included in the afterschool enrichment grant program, reducing licensing fees for child care providers, and creating scholarships to help low-income families access quality early childhood education program.

Minnesota Head Start Association unites Head Start programs on issues affecting low-income children and families. The Association' also works with Head Start programs to improve services and policies by gathering information about gaps and trends in local service delivery, identifying common concerns for local programs and families, and developing statewide strategies for improvement. Current projects include an Annual Parent Training Conference for about 500 parents each year, an Oral Health Campaign, and a Statewide Action Plan to strengthen Head Start's approach to children's mental health.

Minnesota Licensed Family Child Care Association supports the highest standard of care for children in licensed family child care homes through education, resources, recognition, and advocacy while acknowledging the diversity of licensed family child care providers. The association provides a statewide mentor program that matches trained child care mentors with new child care providers in order to increase retention in the field. In addition, they recognize a “Child Care Advocate of the Year” each year, and hold child care conferences.

Minnesota School Age Care Alliance (MNSACA) promotes quality child care and after-school programming through leadership and professional education opportunities. MNSACA providers support opportunities for child care professionals that focus on quality care and cultural respect, advocate for policies around out-of-school time care, and join in state-wide coalitions and initiatives around child care.

Health and mental health

Minnesota Association for Children’s Mental Health (MACMH) is a statewide education and advocacy organization that is viewed as the state’s primary resource for children’s mental health. MACMH creates and disseminates fact sheets on children’s mental health for parents and professionals to reference, and provides training to parents and professionals around advocacy, education, accessing services, leadership, and general background information.

Minnesota Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is an association that has grown as a division of MACMH. This association promotes the social and emotional well-being and development of infants and young children. It founded an endorsement program for professionals who work in areas of infant and early childhood mental health in a variety of settings. Professionals, who apply for and obtain this endorsement through demonstration of specialized knowledge and culturally competent best practice skills, will be recognized in the community as experts in this field. Training and reflective supervision are required at each of the four levels of the endorsement. They also collaborated with CEED to establish the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health endorsement.

Organizations

Early learning

The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota focuses on applied research, training, and community outreach in order to facilitate positive change in early education, child care, and public policy. Recently, they have worked on projects related to social and emotional development, mental health issues, and literacy and reading. They are providing overall evaluation oversight to MELF.

Child Development Services (CDS) is the unit within the Minnesota Department of Human Services that promotes children's development and learning by improving the quality of children's care and education. They administer funding for child care quality improvements as designated by the federal Child Care Development Fund. The money they grant supports organizations to do consumer education with parents; child care providers to improve facilities, expand services, access training, or make capital improvements; and professional development, including mentoring and coaching for caregivers.

Early Childhood Resource and Training Center (ECRTC) is a nonprofit community-based agency that supports families and communities to ensure the healthy development of all children. ECRTC provides home visiting consultations to discuss issues such as school readiness, literacy, behavior management, nutrition, and safety; trains and supports FFN caregivers in Somali and East African communities; established the American Indian FFN School Readiness Project; offers trainings, meetings, and dialogues within communities to build capacity for system changes; certifies early childhood professionals through training courses at two different levels; hosts culturally specific groups for childcare providers and community leaders to discuss issues around early childhood education; instructs early childhood educators in English Language Learning, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and basic computer skills; and focuses on

the importance of culture in healthy social development for all children, not just those within a certain ethnic group.

First Children's Finance (formerly known as the Development Corporation for Children) is a non-profit financing and business training/development resource that offers technical assistance to professionals regarding their financial and business practices to improve the quality and financial viability of child care and early education businesses in order to increase children's school readiness. The organization spans the Central United States, but is based in Minneapolis. Its revolving loan fund to help support child care businesses has provided 215 loans totaling over \$5 million.

Hennepin County Library's Birth to Six website provides resources to parents to increase early literacy skills. The program includes book lists, activities, reading tips, websites and other resources available in English and Spanish.

League of Women Voters is an advocacy group that lobbies for programs and policies. The group supports programs, services, and policies at all levels of government to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care in order to increase access to employment and to prevent and reduce poverty, specifically the basic sliding fee program for child care, resources and referral services, adequate wages and benefits for child care workers, and parental leave programs. The League advocated for a guaranteed unpaid parental leave bill and for crisis nurseries and home visiting programs.

Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network, through a statewide system of non-profit agencies, works to help families find child care and understand their care options; supports quality improvement among child care providers through grants, training, and education; and informs the business and wider community on the importance of child care. CCR&R is a key partner in implementing and testing Parent Aware, a child care quality rating system.

Minnesota Children's Museum provides hands-on learning-focused play experiences to children age 6 months to age 10. The museum's seven galleries are each designed to stimulate children's curiosities and to improve their understanding and appetite for learning. As a national leader, many of the exhibits also travel to provide experience to children across the country. The museum also has educator workshops at the museum and at the location of educators on early learning techniques for fostering child growth and development through early literary, music and movement, math, science, and art.

Minnesota Reading Corps matches children age three to third grade who need extra support in reading with trained staff and volunteers. The goal of this program is to help these children become more proficient in their literacy skill and to enhance literacy tutoring efforts. Minnesota Reading Corps collaborates with AmeriCorps programs,

schools, volunteers, families and community partners to ensure that challenged young readers are supported by research-based tutoring interventions. Some members work with preschoolers and focus on integrating talking, reading, and writing into all activities. Other members tutor children from kindergarten to third grade in literacy. Still others recruit, train and manage community volunteers to expand the capacity of the program. MRC members and volunteers are trained in research-based, leveled literacy instruction. They are also supported by expert coaches. Members track student progress, and with help from their expert coaches, use this data to inform tutoring strategies for each student.

Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care (MNTRECC) provides resources and referrals for child care and other early childhood programs to enhance and strengthen the childcare delivery system for Native American children and families throughout the state of Minnesota. MNTRECC provides technical assistance and support to tribal child care programs, provides networking opportunities for tribal child care providers to share experiences and speak in a unified voice on issues unique to Native children, connects tribal providers with other providers, and educates the state about issues of Native American children.

Ready 4 K is a school readiness advocacy and policy development organization working to bring about comprehensive policy change on behalf of Minnesota's children, their parents, and their caregivers. Its mission is to assure that every young child in Minnesota enters kindergarten encouraged, supported, and fully prepared for learning success. Ready 4 K oversees the BUILD Initiative in Minnesota.

Ready 4 K also runs the **Hmong Project** to enhance school readiness awareness, advocacy skills, and leadership among Hmong community members and parents. The project works with an advisory committee from the Hmong community and a working group of direct service providers. Similar efforts are proposed for other immigrant, refugee, and cultural communities.

Resources for Child Caring (RCC) is a Metro area child care resource and referral organization that educates child care professionals, publishes award-winning books for parents and professionals, and advocates for child care systems in public policy. RCC provides a resource and referral service to parents so they are equipped to find the best child care provider or program for their children. RCC reaches out to Eritrean, Ethiopian, Hmong, Latino, and Somali communities to guide parents to high-quality culturally respectful child care providers. Training is offered for early childhood professionals either face-to-face or online. They also monitor legislation, advocate, contact public officials, participate in action campaigns, meet with policy makers, and testify as needed on behalf of each childhood education.

St. Paul Public Library has a website available for children (Kidsite) with book lists, online games, and websites. Local libraries also hold onsite activities for children that include storytimes and live performers.

Family support

The Blandin Foundation supports community events and partnerships around early childhood education efforts, including an annual Children’s Fair every April, where parents and young children are connected with health, education, child care and other important services; and Baby Steps Boutique, where parents can use coupons from participation in programs or activities which promote healthy families to buy children’s clothing, furniture, toys, books, diapers, and other items.

Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery is a 72-hour residential shelter for children from birth to age six. The nursery is a safe place where children can stay if their parents are in the midst of a crisis. While there, children receive meals, medical care, if needed, and developmentally-appropriate activities. The nursery also has a 24-hour telephone hotline for parents, and provides parent counseling and education. Parents facing longer-term challenges are eligible to participate in the “4th Day Program,” in which staff use an in-home visiting model to help families achieve longer-term self-sufficiency. The nursery has a number of community partners, including the University of Minnesota, ECFE, Salvation Army, and other local churches and agencies.

Lifetrack Resources is an organization that works holistically with the highest need families, primarily in Ramsey County, to provide healthy development, and employment and economic opportunities for children and families. Among its many programs are a therapeutic preschool; a home visiting program; speech, language, occupational, physical and mental healthy therapy; in-home therapy for children with mental health issues; support for parents in county social service systems; and family assessments for families at risk of having a child protection case open.

Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention & Parenting (MOAPPP) provides resources for parents, teens, educators, health care providers, youth workers, media professionals and policy makers to promote adolescent sexual health, prevent adolescent pregnancy, and support adolescent parents.

Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota, the Minnesota Chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America, offers direct and indirect child abuse and neglect prevention programs. Their programs include parent support groups, public awareness campaigns, conferences and trainings, and educating community leaders.

Way to Grow promotes early childhood development through diverse home visitors offering education, school readiness support, and training. Way to Grow serves very low-income children from prenatal care through age five in Minneapolis. The program takes a holistic approach to promoting school readiness through parent education and support. The program teaches parents about prenatal care, child health and nutrition, early child development, positive parenting, early literacy skills, and how to teach their child through everyday interaction and play activities. Parents are also referred to appropriate health care services and community resources as needed.

Working Family Resource Center works through businesses to support and educate working families on work-life issues.

Health and mental health

Ed Watch is an advocacy group that promotes limited government and the primacy of parental rights. They are particularly opposed to children's mental health initiatives and measuring emotional social development. Members frequently provide testimony before the MN House and Senate and submit reports to members of Congress about early education issues. The group also hosts a website and distributes weekly email alerts and updates.

Children's Defense Fund is a research and advocacy organization that is dedicated to ensuring that all children have health care coverage. They collect data from each Minnesota county to evaluate the well being on the state's children and families. They also strive to place the well-being of children as a central part of all policy decision making. Children's Defense Fun publishes "KIDS COUNT," a county-by-county databook that provides on the well-being of Minnesota's children and families. Minnesota KIDS COUNT releases periodic reports and an annual data book to provide a statistical profile of Minnesota's children and suggestions for action on their behalf.

Special needs

The Center for Inclusive Child Care (formerly **Project Exceptional**) promotes and supports inclusive care for children with special needs. The program is a comprehensive resource network for inclusive early childhood, school age programs, and providers, offering training statewide to early care and education providers and parents of children with special needs. Other services include consultation, technical assistance, resources, research and referral support, observation, and staff development.

PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights) assists and advocates for children and young adults with all types of disabilities to expand opportunities and enhance their and their families' quality of life. In Minnesota and nationwide, it provides assistance to individual families, workshops, materials for parents

and professionals, and leadership in securing appropriate public education for all children. Its programs for Pacer has children with all disabilities and their parents and families include Baby Welcome, for parents of infants with newly diagnosed children, and Early Childhood Intervention, services and support for families of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with special needs. PACER also publishes materials and provides workshops on IDEA to inform parents and professionals of their rights and responsibilities under the law.

Programs

Early learning

Child Care Assistance Program helps eligible families pay for child care. Administered by the Department of Human Services, the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial assistance to low-income families for child care of their choice for children up to age 12, or special needs children up to age 14. Each family's copayment depends on their gross income and family size. There is also a sliding fee scale for families that do not qualify for total assistance. Families must use a licensed or a legal unlicensed child care provider over the age of 18.

Cultural Beginnings is offered through the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network. The program facilitates community and systems interactions that promote the full participation of diverse racial/ethnic communities. It also builds capacity in communities of color, white communities, and in the child care system to create a range of culturally appropriate child care options.

Eager-to-Learn is an e-learning program offered by the CCR&R Network to provide affordable educational opportunities for caregivers.

Early Childhood Special Education serves students from birth to kindergarten. Eligibility is determined through screening. Services are offered through community and home-based services, intervention groups, half-days at a school (center-based) and weekly and monthly home visits.

Early Reading First is a federal-funded program that supports early childhood programs that serve primarily children from low-income families to enhance the early language, cognitive, and pre-reading skills that prepare children for school success. The program supports professional development for teachers and provides science-based early language and reading development and instructional materials. Minnesota grantees have included Bloomington, Cass Lake, St. Paul, and Minneapolis schools.

Head Start is a child and family development program that promotes school readiness and health for low-income children ages five and younger by providing comprehensive services including health promotion, home visits, parental education, and help reaching educational and employment goals. To be eligible, families must have incomes at or below the federal poverty level. In addition, Head Start serves children in families receiving public assistance or in foster care. The program has center-based classrooms, and holds programming a minimum of 3.5 hours per day, 4 days per week, 128 days a year. It is funded by the federal government, and the state's General Fund. **Early Head Start** offers services for pregnant woman and low income families with children 0-3. Services are offered through home visiting and in center-based care situations.

At the federal level, Head Start has its own governance system. It is administered by the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. Monitoring is conducted by the states, but reported to the Office of Head Start. In addition, each Head Start grantee must have an advisory board that consists of community members, teachers, parents, and state representatives as appropriate.

High Five serves Minneapolis children who turn five years old between September 2 and December 31 and just miss the kindergarten cut-off. Children attend half-day sessions, five days per week. High Five is similar to kindergarten, but geared for a younger child.

HIPPY is a learn and play program for children ages 3 to 5 that builds on the basic bond between parents and children. Supported by an easy-to-use structured curriculum with activity packets, home visits, and group meetings, HIPPY parents learn how to prepare their children for success in school.

IBM KidSmart Early Learning Program integrates new interactive teaching and learning activities using the latest technology into pre-kindergarten curricula, partnering with United Ways and Initiative Foundations to provide technology to early childcare providers.

Infant Toddler Training Intensive (ITTI) is administered jointly by the Minnesota CCR&R network and Minnesota Department of Human Services. The ITTI program recruits and trains caregivers to provide training to other infant/toddler caregivers statewide using a curriculum developed by West Ed Center for Child and Family Studies. Training is available in Spanish, Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, Thai and English. In-service hours for caregivers are also available to meet licensing requirements, and hours can be counted for an infant/toddler specialization Child Development Associate certificate. Most regions of the state offer opportunities for college credit, primarily through the technical college system, and some also offer CEUs. Funders also include The Bush Foundation, which has invested about \$3 million since 1993.

Minnesota Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners provides common standards for professional development for early childhood practitioners. The Core Competencies are published by the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC) in collaboration with the Minnesota Professional Development Council.

Minnesota Early Literacy Training Program prepares preschool educators to help Minnesota children develop early literacy and language skills, with a focus on reaching children from poor neighborhoods, with limited proficiency in English, and with disabilities. The program is collaboration among the University's Center for Early Education and Development, the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network, the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Minnesota Department of Education, and White Earth.

Primary Project is an initiative of Hennepin County's Youth Coordinating Board, which promotes school success by creating a safe, nurturing relationship with a caring adult. It is a nationally recognized program that helps preschool students feel more confident and comfortable in the classroom by spending one-on-one time, twice a week with a trained adult. In order to participate in this program, children are hand-picked and staff are extensively trained to work with them and their families. The project is being piloted at five child care centers in Minneapolis, including two of the Children's Home Society & Family Services' early childhood education centers.

SEEDS of School Readiness and Early Literacy Program is offered through Child Care Resource and Referral. The program is a series of seven 2 1/2 hour sessions for adults that care for children age 3 to 5. SEEDS gives child care providers and parents information about how to create a literacy rich classroom or home for young children.

St. Paul Blast Off to Kindergarten is a joint program of the Saint Paul Public Libraries, Saint Paul Public Schools, the City of Saint Paul Mayor's Office, and the United Way. The website provides activities, organized by month, for parents to do with their children to help children get ready for kindergarten.

St. Paul Project Early Kindergarten – In addition to providing kindergarten classes for 4-year-olds, the St. Paul Public Schools is working with licensed child care providers to improve the quality of care, by sharing effective early childhood instructional and curriculum techniques, and to ease the transition from pre-school to kindergarten.

School Readiness is administered by the Minnesota Department of Education and funded by the state's General Fund and parent fees. It serves children age 3 and older to prepare them for kindergarten. The program consists mostly of school-based classroom programs that meet 2.5 hours per day, ranging from once a week to five days per week.

Strong Beginnings is a Minneapolis-based early education program that works with children ages 3 through 5. The program, provided at 15 community-based child care centers, focuses on cognitive, social, and emotional development to prepare the child for future school success. For the parent, the program provides education, support, and opportunities for parent involvement.

Success by Six is a program of the Greater Twin Cities United Way. The program educates parents about children's development, creates access to high quality early child care for high risk children, helps child care providers increase the quality of their programs, and builds partnerships across sectors.

Words Work!™ is an early literacy program aimed at closing the achievement gap beginning in preschool. The program, which has taken place in over 40 Head Start classrooms in Ramsey and Dakota counties, uses an integrated approach to support learning and teaching. Words Work!™ uses four key principles: Surround children with literacy; respect home language and culture; teach the teachers, helping them stay engaged, motivated, and satisfied as members of learning teams; and use assessment for continual improvement, empowering teachers to understand, plan, and implement strategies that meet student needs.

Family support

Dakota Healthy Families (DHF) – Dakota Healthy Families is a ten-year-old initiative of the Dakota County Public Health Department. It is a research-based, child abuse prevention and early learning program for significantly stressed expectant and new parents. Home visitors teach problem-solving skills and parental empathy to prevent potential child maltreatment issues. Other services to parents include reducing social isolation by fostering community-based supports and connections to health care services, educational opportunities, and food and housing resources. Home visits occur weekly over the first 18 months of service, with decreasing visits up to age four, based on individual family needs. DHF uses the Growing Great Kids curriculum, which emphasizes child development within the context of a positive parent-child relationship. Interventions focus on promoting good birth outcomes, infant parent attachment, and healthy growth and development.

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) provides parenting education and support for parents, expectant parents, and extended family members. The program educates parents about child development, enhances their skills to provide for their child's learning and development, and offers learning experiences that promote child development for parents and children. ECFE serves children from birth to kindergarten, emphasizing programming for children age 3 and younger. The program usually consists of two-hour

session, once per week during the school year. It is funded by the General Fund, Local Levy, and Parent Fees, and administered by the Minnesota Department of Education.

Native American Parenting Traditions – Revisited is a curriculum/toolkit that aims to increase the positive family management skills of American Indian parents affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder. The program is supported by a grant from Cummins Power Generation and developed in collaboration with Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center, Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association, and Native American Community Clinic.

Health and mental health

ABCD II Grant (Assuring Better Child Mental Health Development) program is supervised by DHS and administered by individual counties. Minnesota is one of five states participating in this three-year learning collaborative that develops services for young children whose mental health development is at risk. The grant trains medical providers, introduces routine mental health screening in pediatric clinics, maps current screening programs and tools for maternal depression, and provides referrals. Grant activities are funded by the Commonwealth Fund, and administered by the National Academy of State Health Policy (NASHP). Pediatric screenings are reimbursed by EPSDT (state and federal Medicaid dollars). Child welfare screenings are reimbursed by a state appropriation. The program also works with Interagency Early Intervention Committees to develop training and orientation for parents of young children newly identified as needing early childhood mental health services.

Child and Teen Checkups (C&TC) provides comprehensive preventative health benefits to children who are receiving medical assistance. The program aims to prevent disease and detect treatable conditions before they become serious health concerns by providing public health nurses to complete and teach about the importance of screening. This program is administered by DHS, though MDH also provides training and technical assistance, and MDE helps to coordinate screenings.

Early Childhood Screening program through MDE identifies normal aspects of children's health and development while also detecting potential problems that may need further evaluation. It also builds connections between parents and resources in their community. Outreach and follow-up contacts include written and face-to-face contacts with clients/families, promotional materials, C&TC parent checklists, C&TC appointment cards, multicultural materials such as translated program brochures, posters, videos/media, and calendars. Outreach contacts with families occur at home visits, WIC, Maternal and Child Health Programs, Head Start, health fairs, community events, schools, or food shelves. MDH helped to fund the *Emergency and Community Health*

Outreach Show on early childhood screening. This show was broadcast in several languages including, English, Hmong, Khmer, Lao, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Growing Up Health: Kids and Communities is a funding initiative of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation that aims to improve the health of Minnesota's children by focusing on the social and environmental determinants of health. Organizations throughout Minnesota are eligible to apply for planning grants of up to \$25,000 to develop a plan to improve and protect the health of children through place-based projects. Grantees may then apply for an implementation grant to carry out their plan.

Family Home Visiting Program is coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Health, and provides non-medical public health nurse home visiting services to families in need. It is implemented by counties, tribes, and/or local community health organizations.

Healthy Child Care America strives to build links between medical and child care professionals and offer support for all children, including those with special needs. This is done through collaboration between CCR&R, Head Start, school districts, and health clinics. DHS oversees this program.

The Incredible Years is a research-based, award-winning program for reducing children's aggression and behavior problems and increasing social competence at home and at school. The program offers parent training, teacher training, and child social skills training.

National Early Hearing Detection Intervention (EHDI) is a federal program that aims to assure all newborns receive hearing screening by one month of age, diagnosis of hearing loss by three months of age and intervention by six months of age. Hospitals, physicians, public health, human services, and education agencies oversee this effort. Goals are monitored by the Center for Disease Control. EHDI is a collaborative effort between the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services.

Newborn Screening Program in Minnesota provides two types of screening to infants. The Blood Spot Screening screens infants for inheritable and congenital diseases through a mandatory blood test. The Newborn Hearing Screening is also mandatory and provided by audiologists trained to screen newborns. MDH oversees, reports, and tracks the results of both of these screenings.

Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant – The Minnesota Department of Health receives a federal Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant to help ensure the health of Minnesota's mothers and children. The grant focuses on hard-to-reach, low-income, children with special health care needs and/or racial and ethnic minority populations. As part of the grant, MDH provides annual reports to the federal

government on activities, progress, expenditures, and upcoming plans. In addition, every five years the Title V program must undertake a comprehensive needs assessment to identify state MCH priorities for the next five years, arrange programmatic and policy activity around these priorities, and develop state performance measures to monitor the success of their efforts Public Health agencies and/or other community partners.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program provides nutrition education and counseling, nutritious food and referrals to community resources such as early intervention, primary care, ECFE, School Readiness, Early Head Start and Head Start. It is administered by the Minnesota Departments of Health and Education.

Special needs

Follow along Program is a screening program through the Minnesota Department of Health that assists parents in determining if their children are at the same developmental stage as other children their age. Through a series of questionnaires, children's development is measured over time. Health professionals also provide parents with a list of age appropriate activities and make referrals to early intervention in a timely manner.

Individual Interagency Intervention Plan (IIP) Guidebook was developed by the Minnesota System of Interagency Coordination (MnSIC) as a resource for local service providers to develop and implement IIPs for children and youth with disabilities age birth through 21.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Part C) established a system for reaching all infants and toddlers who are eligible for early intervention efforts. MDE is the lead agency, but they have interagency agreements with MDH and DHS to help fulfill the requirements. Minnesota's Part C Early Intervention coordinates services through the local Interagency Early Intervention Committees (IEIC) for children from birth to age 3. Part C helps families find health, educational, and social services that promote the development of their eligible infants and toddlers; and provides family-centered intervention services to children from birth to age 3. Children with a delay or disorder in development or an identifiable sensory, physical, mental or social-emotional condition or impairment are eligible for referrals, screening, evaluation, assessment, and other special education related services (e.g., therapy or transportation).

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