

**“Mixed Delivery:” Necessary, But Not Sufficient**

“Mixed delivery” is a popular early education buzzword. Is it a good or bad thing? It depends.

**What is “mixed delivery.”** When people say they support “mixed delivery,” they usually mean a system that delivers early education in a variety of settings – schools, centers, homes, churches and nonprofit organizations. That’s fine as far as it goes, but the term doesn’t speak to the research-based values of the system.

**What is the best kind of “mixed delivery?”** Our goal must be mixed delivery system built on four research-based core principles for closing Minnesota’s worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps:

- **START EARLY.** Offer the multiple years of full-day early learning that vulnerable children need.
- **TARGET RESOURCES.** Put children who can’t afford quality programs first in line for limited public funds.
- **DEMAND BEST PRACTICES.** Require the use of kindergarten readiness best practices.
- **KEEP IT FLEXIBLE.** Give parents portable funding so kids don’t get cut off, as well as a variety of quality options so they can choose a program that fits their work schedule, location, culture and other preferences.

**Minnesota needs a better type of “mixed delivery.”** Currently Minnesota’s system offers early education in multiple settings, so it’s “mixed delivery.” But this table shows Minnesota’s mixed delivery system is not entirely built on the research-based principles for closing achievement gaps by kindergarten.

Comparing Early Care and Education Programs

Research-based Principles	MELF Piloted Scholarships	Universal pre-K* (Fully implemented)	Alternative Pathway II Scholarships	Child Care Assistance Program
Start early	Somewhat		Somewhat	✓
Target resources	✓		✓	✓
Demand best practices	✓	✓	✓	Somewhat
Keep it flexible	✓			Somewhat

*Note: \*MDE calls this program “Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK)” to promote that school districts are not yet required to participate. However, all major VPK champions stress that they want VPK to soon become universal, or available for free to all 4-year olds from all income levels. To ensure readers understand the intent to be universal, this document refers to VPK as “universal pre-K (UPK).”*

So, supporting a mixed delivery system is fine, but it’s is not enough. We must insist on moving toward a mixed delivery system that is built on the research-based principles for closing achievement gaps. As the table above shows, the best available tool for doing that is the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation Piloted Scholarships, which are similar to today’s Early Learning Scholarships (Pathway I). Flexible Scholarships not only empower parents to choose from schools, centers, homes, churches and nonprofits, they also start early, target resources, and demand best practices.