



**Statement of Ericca Maas
Executive Director, Close Gaps by 5
Re: Early education this session
May 24, 2019**

“This session started with H.F. 1, a bold vision for expanding early care and education to nearly all of the 35,000 low-income children who still can’t access quality programs. That was followed by an encouraging proposal from Senate Republicans to make more Early Learning Scholarships available to left-behind children. These 35,000 children are the most likely to fall into Minnesota’s worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps, which open as early as age one.

This week, a biennial education budget that only reduces the number of left-behind children by about 1,000 per year was made public. **At that rate of change, it will take our leaders until 2087 to help Minnesota’s remaining low-income, left-behind children.** Asking a vulnerable child born today to wait until they are nearly 70 years old to see an end to this crisis is simply not acceptable.

While there will be a significant \$540 million increase for education in the upcoming biennium, no additional money was allocated to move left-behind children from waitlists to programs. The only early education funding included will go toward continuing temporary funding for a flawed Universal Pre-K approach that had already been in place, an action that does nothing to address the needs of the tens of thousands of young, low-income children being left behind.

We recommended incremental investment to serve an additional about 15,000 low-income children. Instead, an accounting shift and policy change will allow an estimated 1,600 more children to receive Scholarships in 2020, with a drop to an additional 1,000 in 2021 and beyond. While we welcome any effort to help, we can’t sugarcoat the fact that these changes do absolutely nothing for 34,000 vulnerable children who will continue to be left behind.

As we have in past years, we also recommended a series of reforms to make existing early education spending streams more coordinated, effective, efficient and aligned with early education research. The Office of the Legislative Auditor has also offered many constructive ideas. None of those reforms were enacted.

The bottom line: Minnesota started the session with the reality of 35,000 low-income children left behind, and we will end the session with a future where 34,000 children continue being left behind year after year. We started with an uncoordinated, unaccountable early learning system, and we end with the exact same system.

If the Legislature and Governor are truly serious about closing our worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps – gaps that open as early as age one – we have to do much better than this for our most vulnerable young learners.”

-END-