



**Statement of**

**Ericca Maas  
Executive Director, Close Gaps by 5**

**Re: Early Education Spending by Minnesota House, Senate and Governor**

**March 28, 2017**

“With state funding limited, Minnesota’s early education investments must prioritize the 40,000 low-income children under age five who currently lack public support to access high quality early care and education opportunities. These are the children who are most at-risk of falling into Minnesota’s worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps.

The Early Learning Scholarship model was developed in 2006 by the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) based on the best available research about the most effective strategies for preparing low-income children for kindergarten. As such, Scholarships are a better tool for helping low-income children than the well-intentioned Universal Pre-K (UPK) model.

- Scholarships target assistance to the most in need, low-income children. At the same time, Universal Pre-K uses limited state funding to subsidize wealthier families, while leaving thousands of younger low-income children unserved.
- Scholarships offer the option of full-day, full-year programs to meet the needs of parents working full-time, and to maximize learning time for children who need it most. Universal Pre-k offers programs that only operate 2- to 3-hours per day and that are closed in the summer.
- Scholarships offer multiple years of help, which vulnerable children need to be ready for kindergarten. Universal Pre-k only offers nine months of help to those children, and delays help until they reach age four.
- Scholarships tap into thousands of existing high quality programs operating in schools, centers, homes, churches and nonprofits. Universal Pre-k would need to build new infrastructure at great expense, while needlessly excluding current high quality programs.

We applaud all Minnesota leaders who invest in early education, but the way Minnesota invests matters for our most at-risk children. **The House proposal increases Scholarship investment by \$24 million in the upcoming biennium, and that focus on scholarships is the best for helping the low-income children who are most likely to fall into achievement gaps.**

**Combining the House’s focus on evidence-based Scholarships with the Governor’s admirable level of early education investment would go furthest towards closing Minnesota’s achievement gaps. We strongly encourage the two sides to move in that direction. ”**

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Note: Close Gaps by 5 is a nonprofit organization championing the use of high quality early education to close Minnesota's worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps by age five. Background on Close Gaps by 5 is available at [www.closegapsby5.org](http://www.closegapsby5.org).

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