

Focusing on early learning and child care

By [TODD LIPPERT](#) Guest columnist

Every child deserves a great start in life. Minnesotans can agree on this. Brown, black or white, whether the child lives on a farm or in the city, every child deserves the best opportunity to succeed.

We need to do more in Minnesota to keep our promises to our children. This is why the House DFL proposes investing in early care and learning to support families and close education opportunity gaps.

One concern I hear regularly is the need for affordable child care. I hear this from families across our district, and I hear this from community leaders as well. The average cost of infant care in Minnesota is \$16,087, or \$1,341 per month. This is just the average. Many families pay more, especially those with more than one child.

Finding a child care provider can be just as challenging. According to a First Children's Finance study conducted in 2018, Northfield has a potential need of over 200 child care slots. Lonsdale, a community one fourth the size of Northfield, has a potential need of over 150 child care slots. Minnesota's child care providers take great care of our children, often at poverty-level wages, but it is increasingly difficult for providers to stay in business.

At the same time, Minnesota faces some of the worst education achievement gaps in the nation. There are disparities across race and ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status. Expanding the availability of early care and learning is a proven method for addressing opportunity gaps. Research shows that the biggest payoff comes in the earliest weeks and months of life, birth to age three.

We are also facing a workforce shortage as a state due to the retiring baby boomer generation. Now more than ever, we need to focus our effort on giving all children a great start, and then support them with an excellent educational system that doesn't let them fall through the cracks.

Responding to these needs, the House DFL will focus on investing in early care and learning this session. This will support families, narrow education opportunity gaps, and it is part of the long-term work we need to do to respond to the workforce shortage.

Our proposal will invest \$500 million in one time funds. \$190 million will go towards child care assistance for families, and an additional \$22 million will go towards grants and loans for child care providers. We need child care providers to stay in business, and we need to make sure that families can afford the child care they need.

We will also invest \$190 million in early learning scholarships for 3-year-olds across the state. An additional \$60 million will be directed towards voluntary pre-kindergarten programs, and \$30 million will be directed towards home visiting programs for children ages 0-3.

All Minnesota children deserve a great start. Let's keep our promise to our children. Let's support our families. Let's build a Minnesota that works for everyone.

Todd Lippert, D-Northfield, represents District 20B in the Minnesota House of Representatives