



**Statement of
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**Early Learning and the 2021 Session of the Minnesota Legislature
June 28, 2021**

Good News – Child Care Sector Stabilized. “This session, nearly \$500 million in new one-time federal COVID relief money and \$8 million in state funding went to Minnesota’s existing child care providers and toward developing new child care supply. Though that was basically the bare minimum required of the state by the federal government, that funding for improved reimbursement rates, grants and other supports is necessary to stabilize our child care sector, which struggled mightily during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bad News – Our Most Vulnerable Children *Still* Left Behind. In order to address Minnesota’s worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps it is not enough to support child care providers; we must also dramatically increase access to high-quality programs for Minnesota’s most vulnerable children. There is still *much* unfinished business in this area of early care and education.

- **Most Vulnerable Children Not Prioritized.** Despite historic levels of new resources available to them – and more than \$1 billion in flexible federal funds still left unspent – Minnesota’s most vulnerable young children weren’t a top priority for legislators.

For instance, with a state budget surplus of \$1.6 billion, none of the nearly \$1 billion in new funding allocated for the E-12 system for the next four years went to the “E” in E-12 (i.e. children ages zero to five). Since about one-third of children under age 18 are under age 5, a proportional share would have been \$330 million. But instead, not one more young child will be served as a result of this state E-12 budget. Unfortunately, Minnesota’s youngest, poorest, and least served kids aren’t as powerful at the state capitol as the lobbyists who dominate public education policymaking.

No one disputes that Early Learning Scholarships reach children that other programs, like the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) due to its rigid rules, cannot, including many children experiencing homelessness, foster care, and the child protection system. And yet no new investments of state or federal funds were made in Scholarships this session.

As a result of legislators’ inaction, tens of thousands of low-income children ages zero to five are still unable to access the quality early learning programs they need to break out of the opportunity gaps at the root of Minnesota’s worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps.

- **Quality Not Demanded for Children.** Research shows low-quality child care programs can set children back when it comes to problem behaviors, cognitive performance, language skills, and school readiness scores. With that research in mind, we were extremely disappointed to see that none of the new investments in child care providers, facilities or CCAP demanded that children served through those investments benefit from use of kindergarten-readiness best practices.

Bottom Line. With nearly \$5 billion in new dollars available and bipartisan support for increasing Scholarship funding, it’s completely unacceptable that tens of thousands of low-income children still can’t access quality early learning programs, and that quality improvement incentives weren’t strengthened. At a time when the national spotlight is squarely on Minnesota for our glaring social inequities, and when we have massive amounts of state and federal resources available, Governor Walz and the Legislature did far too little for Minnesota’s most vulnerable children. If not now, when?”

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