

EARLY CONNECTIONS:

News from the Office of Early Learning

June 2013



~ Letter from Director ~

Happy (finally) summer! As this legislative session and this phase of the Office of Early Learning wraps up, I'm pleased to reflect about where we've been and where we're headed on our state path to improve children's school readiness.

First, the results of this legislative session include new investments and reforms beyond anything we've seen for young children in the last 20 years. Highlights from the Departments of Education, Human Service, and Health include \$40 million for Early Childhood Education Scholarships to help up to 8,000 more low-income Minnesota children receive high-quality childcare and preschool; \$134 million for All-Day Kindergarten for every child; \$19.4 million for Quality Child Care for Children with High Needs to invest in higher rates for some providers, including providers who receive a three or four star Parent Aware rating; improved child care licensing requirements and training in order to reduce child mortality in child-care settings; funding to respond to and prevent childhood lead poisoning and to work on early identification and referral for maternal depression; and expansion of newborn screening to include tests for severe immune system disorders and serious heart defects.

Second, with these new investments we'll be building on a strong foundation of smart state programs, services, and staff that support communities and families in getting all children ready for kindergarten and reading by third grade. We have a rock-solid foundation in the communities-rural, urban and suburban-that have been implementing early learning reform pillars of Parent Aware and Early Learning Scholarships. The last two years of progress have been the result of leadership from the Governor and Children's Cabinet, hard work by the exceptional cross-agency Office of Early Learning team, and of course daily commitment from parents and practitioners, those of you on the ground, spending your time with children and families. I wish I could thank every one of you personally for your work. There's an African proverb that says smooth seas do not make skillful sailors. As I transition away from the Office

I'm confident in the future knowing that we've all become more skillful in our respective roles, from the changes we've made and endured together.

Thank you for all you've done and all you will do.

Finally, I'm thrilled to introduce you to the new Director, Melvin Carter III. Mr. Carter is a two-term member of the St. Paul City Council where he was instrumental in developing the Promise Neighborhood and keeping focus on early childhood as a priority. He has two young daughters and a Master's degree from the Humphrey School of Public Policy at the University of Minnesota. Mr. Carter is a talented convener of people, a fast learner, a passionate advocate for equity, and a believer and supporter of community. Accelerating our state early childhood work requires new champions and new energy that can move diverse groups toward a common vision. Melvin is just the person to do this. He'll be officially on the job in July and I encourage you to welcome him to our statewide team and to send him pictures of young children to continue filling up the floor-to-ceiling map of Minnesota that he is inheriting!

I leave the Office of Early Learning in a significantly stronger position than when it was a mere idea. I am grateful for the opportunity and humbled by the support, passion and optimism all across our state. In the end, the changes we made and will continue to make that improve circumstances for children come from adults changing what we do. Every day on the job as the first Director of the Office of Early Learning, I've worn a bracelet that has a line from Alexander Pope's poem, *The Universal Prayer*: "Teach me to feel another's woe, to hide the fault I see." While this is suggestive of the old adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover," it goes two important steps further which are the reminder to actually enter into another's perspective and to acknowledge that this takes practice. And practice. And more practice. My wish for all of us in our current and future roles is to maintain our collective progress by learning from and listening to each other; by maintaining our important individual and institutional relationships, to use conflict as a creative catalyst; and to practice looking at and supporting each other's strengths and gifts. Minnesota's young children deserve our best selves on the job every day.

Onward, as always.

Karen Cadigan

~ Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant ~

LearnTogether MN Website



It's an exciting time for education in Minnesota! In the past two years, the state has received nearly \$90 million in federal funds to support a range of initiatives aimed to find effective approaches that improve educational outcomes for children in our community. Our goal is to keep our community connected with what's happening around the federal education grants and to capture essential lessons for our region and the nation. To accomplish our goal Greater Twin Cities United Way, in partnership with The McKnight Foundation, have launched [LearnTogether MN](#).

Federal Minnesota grants include: Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, Human Capital Research Collaborative's Investing in Innovation (i3), and Northside Achievement Zone's Promise Neighborhood. To learn more, visit [LearnTogether MN](#).

Early Childhood Scholarships Update

The Minnesota Department of Education is pleased to announce that a new Early Learning Scholarships Program will be available for Minnesota families in early fall of 2013 to increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for three- to five-year-old children with the highest needs. The 2013 Legislature has appropriated \$23 million for FY 2014 (July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014) and \$23 million for FY 2015 (July 1, 2014-June 30, 2015) for the Early Learning Scholarships Program. [Read more about Governor Dayton's historic investment in young children.](#)

- [Read more about this program on the Just for Parents Early Learning page.](#)

Child Care Provider Quality Recognized and Supported Through Parent Aware

Child care providers are finding a new way to ensure that they are delivering quality services through Parent Aware – a rating tool designed to help parents find child care and early education providers committed to school readiness. The one-to-four star rating is the result of a thorough, six-month program assessment. It's a process, Tessa Caron-Enter, owner of Caron's Care in North Mankato, Minnesota, stated that is well worth it. She describes the satisfaction of successfully moving from a two-star rating to a four-star rating in January of 2013.

"I saw Parent Aware as a tool and a way for me to show parents that I had a credible daycare, along with a way to have support to help guide me to become a quality daycare," Caron-Enter stated.

Parent Aware measures proven quality indicators in four key areas: physical health and well-being, teaching and relationships, assessment of child progress, and teacher training and education.

[Parents are able to search online to get information about the rated programs.](#)

"As a provider, it gets your name out to parents letting them know that you work hard to ensure that you have a quality learning environment for their child," Caron-Enter said.

After completing the assessment, each Parent Aware participant has access to grants, quality improvement coaches and marketing materials that allow them to promote their association with Parent Aware. The opportunity to earn a Parent Aware rating is available for any licensed family child care provider, child care center, Head Start and school-based programs.

[More information for both parents and providers is available on the Parent Aware website.](#)

Integration of Board of Teaching (BOT) Standards and Minnesota Core Competencies

Currently, Minnesota has both teaching standards and core competencies. A Race to the Top project focuses on arranging competencies under each Board of Teaching standard. The integrated document will provide a knowledge and competency framework upon which pre-service and in-service professional development will be based. A writing team is using feedback from community sessions held under American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to update the core competencies. The new version will be simplified; formatted in a more user-friendly way; will eliminate redundancies; and will include current research and skills needed to work with children who are learning English in addition to a home language. A final draft is expected to be developed by midsummer. At that time, an implementation team will come together to develop roll-out and communication plans.

New Bilingual/Bicultural Learning Communities Available to Trainers

Currently, Minnesota has a limited number of approved trainers in the Minnesota Center for Professional Development Registry who are bilingual, bicultural and can train English language learners participating in Parent Aware. Yet, there are a number of child care and early learning providers who would benefit from bilingual trainers.

The Race To The Top -Early Learning Challenge Grant is addressing this gap through a statewide initiative to increase the number of approved bilingual, bicultural trainers who are able to deliver Parent Aware trainings. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has awarded Think Small a contract to recruit and support bilingual, bicultural trainers to promote training for programs preparing for or participating in Parent Aware. A variety of supports will be provided to trainers including in-person and virtual learning communities. This initiative will extend until December 2015 with the hope of sustaining the learning communities in subsequent years.

The activities funded through this grant support Minnesota's goals and objectives to promote access to high-quality early childhood services for children with high needs and to build an early childhood great workforce as described in the state's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant, which the department received in January 2012.

~ Additional News from the Office of Early Learning ~

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study

An extensive and growing body of research documents that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—including abuse, neglect, mental illness, problematic drinking or drug abuse, incarceration of a household member, divorce or domestic violence occurring before age 18 are linked to poor physical and mental health, chronic disease, lower educational achievement, lower economic success, and impaired social success in adulthood.

In 2011, the Minnesota Department of Health surveyed more than 13,000 Minnesotan adults on their ACEs and current health and well-being.

The results from this survey are consistent with the findings from other ACE studies. First, ACEs are common. More than half of Minnesotans have experienced at least one ACE. ACEs are more common among Minnesotans who did not graduate from high school, who were unmarried, who rented rather than owned their own home, who were unemployed, or who worried about paying their mortgage or rent or about buying nutritious food. Second, ACEs frequently occur together. In Minnesota, more than half of Minnesotans experiencing ACEs had more than two ACEs. Third, ACEs have a strong and cumulative impact on the health and functioning of adults. For example, Minnesotans with more ACEs were more likely to rate their health as fair or poor, more likely to have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety, more likely to report smoking and chronic drinking, more likely to have been diagnosed with asthma, and more likely to be obese.

Currently, trained community resilience coaches are presenting the ACE data to community groups throughout the state and a multi-state agency and community effort to reduce ACEs and build community resiliency is being planned. Please contact [Autumn Baum, ACE coordinator, at the Minnesota Department of Health for more information.](#)

~ Stay Connected ~

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