Minnesota Department of Education

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$40 Million in Early Learning Scholarships Now Available to Qualifying Families Statewide

Investment by Governor Dayton includes over $2 million in new funding for families in Benton, Stearns and Wright counties to support early education

ROSEVILLE – As the new school year swings into full gear, more of the state's youngest learners will now have access to high quality early education. Thanks to Governor Dayton and the Legislature's $40 million dollar investment over the next biennium in early education scholarships, more than 8,000 students will be given a better start.

"Ensuring every child has access to early education opportunities is essential for closing gaps and placing each student on a path to success in college and career," Commissioner Cassellius said. "I want to thank Governor Dayton and the Legislature for their support and incredible commitment to education."

Starting October 1, low income families will be able to apply for a scholarship. The funds are available for students, aged three to five, with the highest needs in order to improve school readiness for all young children. Up to $5,000 per scholarship will be awarded. Scholarships may be used at any early childhood program participating in the Parent Aware Quality Rating System. The Parent Aware programs a family may choose include Head Start, school-based prekindergarten and preschool programs, and child care programs.

"The research is clear. The best economic investment the State of Minnesota can make is to provide its most vulnerable children with access to high-quality early childhood programs. The early childhood scholarships being made available to Minnesota's children do just that. It is a major step forward to ending inter-generational poverty and ensuring the future success of Minnesota's economy," said Art Rolnick, Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the Human Capital Research Collaborative at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

To ensure balanced distribution of the scholarships, the Minnesota Department of Education spread out the money based on need to the state's 13 economic development regions. Counties that will have access to scholarships include:

- Region 1- Norman, Polk and Red Lake
- Region 2 - Beltrami, Clearwater and Mahnomen
- Region 3 - Carlton, Itasca and Saint Louis
- Region 4 - Becker, Douglas and Otter Tail
- Region 5 - Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison and Wadena

- more -

- Region 6E - Kandiyohi and Meeker
- Region 6W - Chippewa, Swift and Yellow Medicine
- Region 7E - Isanti, Mille Lacs and Pine
- Region 7W - Benton, Stearns and Wright
- Region 8 - Lincoln, Lyon and Nobles
- Region 9 - Blue Earth, Brown, Nicollet and Watonwan
- Region 10 - Mower, Olmsted, Rice and Winona
- Region 11 - Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Scott, Ramsey and Washington

For Benton, Stearns and Wright counties, $2,173,748 for scholarships will be made available during the biennium, providing over 540 children with access to early learning opportunities.

“Last year, the scholarships helped many families enroll their children in a program that otherwise would not have been possible. I am excited to see this program expand, providing many more opportunities for children across the state. At the same time, these funds only meet approximately nine percent of the need throughout Minnesota. I look forward to working with the Governor and Legislature to continue expanding these scholarships, breaking down barriers of access to high quality programs,” Commissioner Cassellius said.

To see if your child is eligible for an early learning scholarship, families should contact their local school district or their regional Scholarship Administrator, Child Care Choices, Inc., at 320-251-5081. To locate a Parent Aware rated program in your area visit the Parent Aware website. For more information on MDE’s early learning scholarship program, visit education.state.mn.us and select Early Learning under the Just for Parents section.

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