

AN OPEN LETTER TO STATE GOVERNMENT LEADERS

May 4, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

We are some of the more than 2,500 child care and early education providers from every corner of Minnesota who have volunteered to participate in Parent Aware. We stepped up to do right by Minnesota children. Now, we're asking you to please join us.

As you finalize Minnesota's early education strategy, we respectfully ask four things of you:

- **INCLUDE US.** Please don't pass a schools-only Universal Pre-k model that formally or effectively excludes us from participating. An independent evaluation of Parent Aware-rated programs finds that children in non-school programs are doing as well as the children in school-based programs. Therefore, excluding non-school programs is not fair or justified. Please let parents select from a broad range of programs based both in and out of schools, as Early Learning Scholarships do.
- **HELP US HELP YOU.** Please help us continue to intensify our use of kindergarten-readiness best practices. We very much want to get all kids ready for kindergarten, and Parent Aware coaches and grants help us to do that. With federal funding for Parent Aware expiring this year, adequate state funding for Parent Aware is an especially urgent need.
- **DON'T DO TOO LITTLE.** Please don't assume that every parent wants a program that is only run two or three hours per day, and is closed in the summer, as is true of many school-based programs. Working parents need the option of a program that offers longer hours and is open year-round. Programs that offer longer hours not only save parents from extra expenses and hassles, they also provide the important continuity young children need to be ready for school.
- **DON'T START TOO LATE.** Please don't wait too long before helping our most at-risk children access stimulating learning environments. The achievement gap can be measured before age one, so waiting for three-years until a child reaches the age of four before getting them into a high quality program would be a serious mistake. The most at-risk kids need more than one-year of early education to catch-up.

To be more specific, **please fully fund Parent Aware (\$13 million new investment each year) and fund as many fully flexible Early Learning Scholarships as possible.** When it comes to early education, those two initiatives should be Minnesota's top priority.

With a challenge as daunting and urgent as our achievement gap, Minnesota needs an "all hands on deck" approach to early education. We need the help of every single early educator who is willing to step up to adopt best practices. In other words, you need us, but we also need you and your support. So, let's work together to make Minnesota's early education system the best in the nation.

Sincerely,

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AN OPEN LETTER TO STATE GOVERNMENT LEADERS

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— AN OPEN LETTER TO — STATE GOVERNMENT LEADERS

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