

**Statement of**  
**Ericca Maas**  
**Executive Director**  
**Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR)**

**January 27, 2015**

**Re: Governor's budget and early education support**

“Starting in 2011, Governor Dayton has been expanding Early Learning Scholarships and the Parent Aware Ratings throughout Minnesota, with substantial bipartisan support in the Legislature. That approach has won Minnesota a prestigious \$45 million federal Race to the Top grant, and has been working well. With that same kind of bipartisan support, this is the year we can bring high quality early education to even more Minnesota kids.

We very much appreciate that Governor Dayton is funding early education and the Parent Aware Ratings in this budget proposal. In the coming weeks, we look forward to working with the Administration and the legislature to design an approach that will build on Minnesota's recent early education successes. To do that, we must do three things.

First, we need to help poor kids first. Year after year, 15,000 low-income Minnesota 3- and 4-year-olds are unable to access high quality early education. These children are the most likely to not be prepared for kindergarten, and to fall into the K-12 achievement gap. If Minnesota is truly serious about narrowing our education K-12 achievement gap, helping pre-kindergarten aged children in low-income families must be our top priority.

Second, we must continue to expand the current scholarship model. We oppose narrow earmarking for any single type of program, and instead support the flexible scholarship model. Scholarships give an equal opportunity for all providers who use kindergarten-readiness best practices, and give a broad range of flexibility to parents.

Finally, we must invest limited tax dollars only on programs using kindergarten-readiness best practices, as measured by the Parent Aware Ratings. That is the best way to ensure that taxpayers get a maximum return on their investment and Minnesota kids get the help they deserve.

If we can work with the Governor and Legislature to achieve those three things, 2015 could be remembered by historians as The Early Education Session.”

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Contact: Ericca Maas, [maas@pasrmn.org](mailto:maas@pasrmn.org) or 612-367-6395.