

## **EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIPS**

### **The Best Early Ed Tool For Narrowing the Achievement Gap**

Minnesota currently faces one of the most important questions of our times: How can we expand early education in a way that narrows the achievement gap that threatens our children, taxpayers and economy? Of the major early education policy tools under consideration, only scholarships has all of these achievement gap-oriented advantages:

**AIMED AT ACHIEVEMENT GAP.** Scholarships are targeted to the low-income kids most at-risk of falling into the achievement gap.

- Scholarships go exclusively to the children who can't otherwise afford a high quality early education. The children being left behind. The kids who are much more likely to be unprepared for kindergarten.

**STARTS EARLY.** The children who are furthest behind often can't catch up with only one year of early education assistance. Scholarships can allow them to access high quality early education programs well before age 4.

- Research finds that the achievement gap starts as early as 9 months of age, so the most vulnerable kids need early learning help as early as possible.

**BRINGING "ALL HANDS ON DECK."** Scholarships tap into high quality early education programs wherever they are blooming -- in public schools, centers, homes, churches or non-profit organizations.

- Given the large number of kids who need help, neither schools nor child care can do it alone. Minnesota needs "all hands on deck." Scholarships are the "both/and" solution that doesn't exclude any type of high quality program, and serves the diverse needs of Minnesota 's communities and families.

**PROVEN.** Scholarships have been shown to improve kindergarten-readiness.

- Two rigorous, independent third-party evaluations (2011, 2016) have found that low-income children with scholarships made significant gains on important kindergarten readiness measures such as early literacy, early math, and social and behavioral skills. The most recent evaluation showed scholarship children gaining enough skills in highly rated programs to reach national averages on math and literacy skills.

**BROADLY SUPPORTED.** Scholarships have the support of bipartisan leaders, a broad community coalition, all types of early educators, and ordinary Minnesotans.

- Governor Dayton, bipartisan legislative leaders, and the Obama Administration have all supported scholarships. Business groups and the 100-organization MinneMinds Coalition endorse them. Early educators in schools, homes, centers, churches, and nonprofit organizations have all embraced them.
- A 2015 survey found that 83% of Minnesotans supported the 2015 expansion of scholarships. Two-thirds (66%) say that low-income children should be the top priority for limited government funding, while only 15% would prioritize all children.

Because Early Learning Scholarships start early and are targeted, inclusive, flexible, proven and broadly supported, they are the best policy mechanism available for using early education to narrow Minnesota's achievement gap.