

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

Re: Supplemental budget agreement for early education programs

May 23, 2016

“Until today, Minnesota had been on a path of prioritizing limited early education funding for low-income children. With this new universal¹ pre-k model, we are now heading down a long-term path of subsidizing wealthier families who can already afford quality services.

Beyond not prioritizing low-income children, this new approach also waits until age four to provide only about two hours per school year day of early education to our most vulnerable children. With research showing that the achievement gap can be measured before age one, we can’t afford to wait three years before getting our most at-risk children into high quality, full-day programs.

For the low-income children who are most at-risk of falling into the achievement gap, the rigid universal model adopted is simply too little, too late. It’s a little like waiting until a patient is in critical condition before starting medical treatment, instead of treating the patient in the early stages of the condition, or taking steps to prevent the condition. In both cases, delaying the intervention for several years is less effective and ultimately more expensive.

While we appreciate that some stopgap funding was allocated to the Parent Aware quality rating and improvement program, we were disappointed that the appropriation is only 15% (\$2 million) of the needed amount (\$13 million). A federal grant has been funding Parent Aware, but the grant expires this year and cannot be renewed. As a result, the future of this proven program is in jeopardy, and that could hurt hundreds of thousands of children in coming years.

While we applaud our bipartisan group of supporters in the Legislature and Administration, we hoped low-income children ages zero to five would fare much better.”

Background: Ten reasons why the scholarships model is a better achievement gap strategy than a universal model are described in this [document](#). The 100-organization [MinneMinds](#) coalition recommended that the Legislature enact the bipartisan ABC (A Better Chance) Act, which would invest as much as possible in Early Learning Scholarships, the Parent Aware early education quality rating and improvement system, and home visiting services. PASR is a member of that coalition. Background on PASR is available at [pasrmn.org](#).”

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¹ The supplemental budget contains language that establishes a new statutory framework for funding a universal program serving all-income families. The framework calls for staged implementation, with the first \$25 million/year stage offering part-day schools-based services in underserved areas. When implemented, a full-day universal pre-k system for all Minnesota 4-year-olds will cost about \$500 million per year.