



PreK to 3
Design
Team

REPORT
January
2017

Executive Summary of Recommendations

Moving to Mixed Delivery, Voluntary Preschool for Four Year Olds: An Approach for Minnesota

Executive Summary of Recommendations

The Pre-K to 3 Design Team, a group of early childhood stakeholders convened by West Central Initiative, with support from the McKnight Foundation, is recommending an approach for providing broad access to high-quality, preschool programming for four year olds in a mixed delivery context. The following recommendations grew out of an intensive discernment process including extensive research, shared learning, work with local and national experts and tapping into networks of parents and providers:

- **Preschool access for all four year olds should be phased in across Minnesota** with initial eligibility extended to children from low-income families and those with additional risk factors. Ultimately, statewide voluntary preschool should be available to all four year olds in Minnesota whose families choose to use it.
- **A mixed delivery system best supports family choice.** These programs can be located in any public, charter or private school; licensed child care center; licensed family child care or Head Start program that meets agreed upon quality criteria.
- **Quality is more important than program type.** Programs with a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware rating represent the minimum quality benchmarks to which programs should be held. The Design Team identified key quality criteria for early childhood programs, such as culturally and linguistically relevant curricula and practice, assessment, and instruction for early childhood programs. Some of these criteria are embedded in Parent Aware and some push beyond Parent Aware's current standards and measures of quality. (Readers will find these criteria articulated on page 8 of the full report.)
- **Parents are their children's first and most important teachers** and should be given choice as to where to send their four-year-old children – based on family needs and preferences.
- **The early childhood system, from prenatal through third grade, needs leadership that will aggressively address the issue of unconscious racial bias which contributes to racial disparities.** We recognize that Minnesota has some of the widest racial disparities in the country when it comes to academic achievement and these disparities start well before children enter kindergarten.
- The early childhood **field should strive towards equity** in educational outcomes for all children regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, home language, geography or culture.



View and download the complete report at prek3.wcif.org

- **Minnesota should support early childhood educators in accessing pathways to higher education and credentials**, including a content-specific BA degree, but should not require a BA at this time. These opportunities should be widely available and accessible to providers from diverse linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, geographic and racial backgrounds. The development of these pathways will take time and resources and should be done in concert with a long-term plan for transforming the workforce. Current early childhood providers need to be supported in obtaining additional credentials by both traditional means and alternate pathways.
- **Transforming the early childhood workforce**, with the requisite funding, higher education opportunities, supports and pathways will not happen overnight and **likely requires at least a decade of sustained attention and investment**.
- Efforts to strengthen the capacity and quality of the workforce should go hand in hand with efforts to **increase the number of bicultural and bilingual early childhood teachers**.
- **Local communities need to design the solutions that will work best for their unique needs**. Local stakeholders that reflect the breadth of Pre-K to 3 services as well as parents and community leaders should be part of the local collaborative process.
- **The State should provide clear guidance around Pre-K quality program standards** and support localities in ensuring that programs meet those benchmarks.
- **There should be investment in the entire early childhood continuum**, from prenatal to third grade. Home visiting and early learning scholarships should be available to children prenatal to age 3 from low income families and/or with additional risk factors.
- Early childhood programs need to be **aligned with high-quality early elementary programs** so that early learning gains are sustained and strengthened through third grade and beyond.