

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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ISSUE BRIEF:

School Readiness and Early Learning

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MACTE is committed to the success and happiness of all Minnesota children, youth and families. In this work, MACTE chooses to support and collaborate with groups such as Ready-4-K, NAEYC, NCCCC, and MnAECTE. The following research findings support aggressive early childhood goals in Minnesota.

Developmentally-appropriate early learning experiences are critical to the success of children later in school and life. Children who experience early education experiences are more successful in kindergarten and are 40% less likely to be identified for special education and grade retention. As young adults, these individuals are more likely to graduate from high school, be literate and attend post-secondary education. In addition, their median annual earnings are higher and are more successful in some other metrics of adult success.

Through active exploration, children in early childhood education settings are provided the opportunity to engage in a broad base of important language, general knowledge, social interaction and experiential skill competencies that serve as a basis for school learning. Children experience rapid social-emotional, physical and cognitive growth during the first five years of life. Rich and stimulating experiences maximizes the growth opportunity during these years. Challenges to health and learning during these years cannot be recovered fully.

In order for every child to succeed, responsive and comprehensive family and community partnerships must be established, mobilizing all appropriate community resources in support of child and family needs as soon as needs are identified. The Ready-4-K "Building Initiative" project and the Rochester project funded by the Rochester Foundation are examples of coordinated efforts to develop community connections which serve the needs of children and their families during the early, preschool years of life. Integrated services are more likely to provide coherent and comprehensive assistance across service providers which results in maximized student readiness and rates of families who thrive.

Costs of early childhood school readiness screenings, learning experiences and family education save much more in expenses to families and society across the life of affected individuals. Rob Grunewald and Art Rolnick of the Minnesota Federal Reserve Bank cite research results -- every \$1 spent on early education saves taxpayers up to \$12. These savings consist of education, welfare and crime savings as well as increased tax earnings. In addition, savings and benefits to families are significant.

A substantial kindergarten experience is necessary to assure all children enter later academic learning situations ready to learn. Research shows that developmentally appropriate full day kindergarten results in greater achievement gains in first grade and beyond for students. These gains hold for students of color and students of poverty, therefore serving to decrease achievement gaps.

Action Needed:

All children must arrive to school healthy and ready to learn.

- The legislature should mandate and fund all-day kindergarten for all Minnesota children.
- The Legislature should mandate and fund a full screening (development, health, hearing, dental, speech) for all Minnesota children at age three and at the beginning of kindergarten. Organizations, agencies, schools and communities should coordinate processes of referral and available services to address the needs of children with identified needs and their families.
- The Legislature should fund the study of the costs and benefits of universal preschool for Minnesota children.
- The Legislature should fund the study of the needs of rapidly growing numbers of preschool-aged Minnesota children with significant and severe disabilities and their families in order to recommend, implement and coordinate appropriate services and interventions.

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