

Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Care & Education

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION (ECE) IN MINNESOTA

High-quality¹ early care and education (ECE) benefits children, families, and businesses and produces a high public return on investment to society. For the past decade, Minnesota has made strides in ECE availability, particularly for children living in low-income families. Since 2013, total investments in [Early Learning Scholarships \(ELS\)](#), [Child Care Assistance Program \(CCAP\)](#), [Voluntary Pre-K](#), and [Head Start](#) have increased by \$500 million annually.

This benefits approximately 50,000 of our youngest learners. Much of this funding is one-time, so it will not be available to families in future years once it has been expended.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HIGH-QUALITY ECE

- Many Minnesota families find high-quality early care and education out of their reach, due to low access to care and high costs. [Research from the University of Minnesota reveals](#) that a staggering 94% of families³ in Minnesota spend significantly more than the federal guideline of 7% of their income on child care, making it financially out of reach for many.

"High-quality childcare and early education is expensive to provide, just like high-quality K-12 education. Unlike K-12, however, families shoulder the burden of paying for it. Infant care in Minnesota costs more than tuition at the University of Minnesota." - [Great Start MN](#)

- Revenue limitations mean that educators and other staff who lead early care and education programs receive limited compensation packages, and these programs (the majority of which are small businesses) operate on slim or non-existent profit margins. This leads to shortages of programs and educators.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM PAST POLICY

Insights were gathered from two focus group sessions involving program administrators and stakeholders from the [Minnesota Early Learning Foundation](#) (MELF) and [Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge](#) (RTT-ELC) pilots, along with evaluation reports from SRI International. Key lessons apply to both geographic pilots and gradual statewide implementation focused on family income.

Key Lessons:

1. Established Infrastructure:

- Fifteen years after the MELF scholarship pilot, infrastructure for Early Learning Scholarships (ELS) is in place; therefore, a future pilot won't need the same level of start-up help from partners.

2. Program Interaction:

- In designing a pilot, consider how it interacts with current program types, such as those that receive a mix of private and public funding (child care) and public-funded programs (Head Start and Voluntary Pre-K in public schools).

3. Innovation Opportunities:

- A pilot can be an opportunity to try out innovations or address system-level elements, such as a coordinated enrollment system or data tracking system. A pilot can also be an opportunity to put resources in place to help boost provider quality.

4. Community Engagement:

- Work with regional ELS administrators and cultural community leaders to make community connections and conduct outreach.

5. Feedback from Providers:

- Connect with leaders within formal and informal networks of early care and education providers to solicit feedback on pilot design and regularly communicate about pilot elements and timing.

6. Clarity in Eligibility:

- Use simple and clear family eligibility requirements and income verification processes.

¹ What is high quality? In Minnesota, high quality is determined and developed through the [Parent Aware Quality Rating System](#).

² Where does 7% come from? This guideline was initially recommended by a task force of the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#) in 2016 and endorsed by the [Minnesota Great Start Task Force](#) in 2022.

³ How many Minnesota families? A [University of Minnesota study](#) estimated that 94% of Minnesota families with young children spend more than 7% of their income on early care and education. This estimate comes from the [Health and Human Services Department, Child Care and Development Fund \(CCDF\) Program](#)

OUR GOAL:



families pay no more than 7% of income² for ECE

OVERVIEW OF GREAT START SCHOLARSHIPS (GSS)

The [Great Start Scholarships](#) framework, guided by the [Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force](#), aims to create an effective early childcare system that supports the holistic development of young children and facilitates parental involvement in the workforce and education. The logic model components for GSS focus on achieving critical developmental outcomes for children while fostering family stability and workforce participation.