



GREETINGS MCCPIN MEMBERS

Your Quality Program

Childcare is evolving as we speak. Throughout history, childcare providers have often been known as 'glorified babysitters'. The informal babysitting that was offered by stay-at-home mothers in previous generations evolved into regulated and then licensed care. Licensing rules have changed and adapted to meet the requirements of federal funding to the state. Quality Improvement and Rating Systems (QIRS) were required by all states and have been implemented. Minnesota's QIRS is called Parent Aware. Quality in early childhood is comprised of 3 elements: structural, process, and practical. Structural quality is the rules and requirements. Process quality is the intentional actions of the provider. Every hug, warm interaction, and caring behavior is process quality. Practical quality is location, hours, and cost to parents. Research shows that providers with higher education initially provide higher quality care. However, research also shows that the intentional actions of a provider, the process quality combined with ongoing professional development mitigates the lack of higher education. This means that YOU have a huge impact on the quality of your program. Your actions and the professional development that you seek out, improves the quality of care you provide.

Brenda Novack
MCCPIN President

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Mission of the Minnesota Child Care Provider Information Network (MCCPIN) is to support, promote, and strengthen the profession of licensed family child care, thereby enriching the lives of providers, children, families, and communities.

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EXPANDED EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

MINNESOTA'S LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS MUST BE INCLUDED IN EXPANDED EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 3- AND 4-YEAR OLDS

Public statement by MCCPIN board

Like it or not, what is sometimes called “universal pre-k” seems likely to be coming soon. In July 2020, the Biden campaign rolled out its plan for all 3- and 4-year-olds to have access to free, high-quality preschool. Fortunately, the Biden plan spells out that a “mixed delivery system” will allow parents to choose from an array of programs based in public schools, child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and Head Start.

If this proposal moves forward, the federal government and the state of Minnesota must design a system that truly allows licensed family child care (LFCC) providers to be a central part of this expansion of early learning. Failure to do so will devastate the financial viability of the quality LFCC providers who Minnesota families depend on to care for their children under age five. To avoid decimating quality LFCC providers, we urge state and federal leaders to take the following steps.

WHAT A FAIR AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS WOULD LOOK LIKE

Include Quality LFCC Providers in Mixed Delivery.

Quality LFCC providers are well prepared to help children get prepared for school and life, but we are not always given the opportunity. For example, some Minnesota programs have included LFCC providers, such as Pathway I Early Learning Scholarships, but some programs have not, such as Pathway II, Voluntary Pre-K, School Readiness, and the vision recently laid out in a written report authored by Education Minnesota, Minnesota's largest teacher's union, and ISAIAH. LFCC providers must be explicitly included as part of mixed delivery systems in state and federal statutes.





System Governance Must Include LFCCs. State advisory groups or other processes that are established to implement early learning improvements for three- and four-year-old children need to be explicitly required to include LFCC providers. LFCC providers have been left out of governance for too long. School districts and the school-centric Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) have proven over the years that they are far from neutral intermediaries. Therefore, those highly biased institutions should not be given disproportionate power in allocating resources or defining standards. We must have truly neutral systems of governance that take into consideration the viewpoints and needs of all types of providers.

Build on Existing Quality Rating and Improvement Infrastructure.

Forty-one states currently have some type of Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in place. Like Minnesota's Parent Aware QRIS system, most of those systems already include LFCC providers in their frameworks. In Minnesota, hundreds of LFCC programs have stepped forward to volunteer for Parent Aware and adopt kindergarten-readiness best practices. So, when a new early learning system for three- and four-year old children is designed, it needs to build on that existing QRIS framework and not invent new and unfamiliar ways of regulating and defining quality that do not recognize LFCC's significant quality improvement work to date.



Parents Must Direct Resources, not Politicians or Bureaucrats. This is critically important. Parents must direct early learning resources, not government bureaucrats or politicians. This is not always happening in Minnesota. Examples: 1) Minnesota's Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) law allows for "mixed delivery," but gives 100% of the money to schools to control, and there is no requirement to include child care programs in general or LFCC providers specifically. 2) Minnesota's Pathway II program technically allows for mixed delivery, but MDE bureaucrats have designed an incredibly involved, complex process that has resulted in a mere 0.4% of Pathway II Scholarships going to LFCC providers.

That is outrageous. Parents should direct resources, period. Therefore, programs with a similar design to Pathway I Early Learning Scholarships should be the primary vehicle for expanding early learning to Minnesota's three- and four-year-old children. Putting parents in charge of directing early learning resources is not only fairest to all providers, but also is the most flexible, efficient, and effective way to distribute funds. When parents are empowered to choose the program that best fits their location, work schedule, cultural preferences, and curriculum wishes, they will distribute resources in much more efficient and family-friendly way than any bureaucratic planner ever could.

If Money Is Directed by School Districts or MDE, Set-Aside Funding for LFCC.

If politicians insist on directing resources through school districts and/or MDE, LFCC providers need guarantees that non-school programs will not be shut out of resources. School districts have a history of effectively excluding quality LFCCs from participation, so specific minimums should be set so school districts can't exclude LFCCs once again.



For instance, 50% of funding flowing through the school district and/or MDE (or more depending on available program supply in each area) could be specifically set-aside for non-school programs, including LFCC programs. But again, the best approach would be to avoid these kinds of arbitrary programmatic set-asides and earmarks, and instead empower parents to distribute resources through their shopping choices.

Red Tape Must Not Be Used to Exclude.

Small LFCC providers are built to provide care and learning to children, but they do not have extensive administrative capacity. Therefore, to ensure that LFCC programs can fully participate in a true mixed delivery system, red tape and complex application processes must be kept to a minimum. As noted earlier, red tape requirements effectively are excluding most LFCC providers from Pathway II Scholarships. Similarly, a recent report written by Education Minnesota, the state's largest teacher's union, and ISAIAH calls for mandatory licensed teachers. This is an unnecessary change that is not supported by research, and it would effectively lock out LFCC programs. Instead of raising paperwork and licensure barriers to LFCC participation, Minnesota should stick with the familiar existing QRIS standards and insist that those standards, along with child care licensing health and safety standards, be required of all types of early learning programs, including school-based programs. This even playing field will best serve families and children.

Federal Funds Must Help LFCCs Improve Quality.

In preparation for a forthcoming mixed delivery early learning system for three- and four-year-old children, Minnesota policymakers must strengthen Parent Aware in ways consistent with the recently released Licensed Family Child Care Task Force recommendations, and bolster quality improvement supports and rewards as much as possible. With billions in federal funding arriving via COVID-19 relief (i.e., American Rescue Plan Act), policymakers have a unique and important opportunity to use one-time resources to further support, strengthen, and expand the LFCC sector. More LFCC providers are ready to step up and further improve their quality and others are on the sidelines waiting to open new LFCC businesses, but they need state support and incentives to do so.

Call It “Early Learning,” Not “Pre-K.”

When it comes to this new expansion of access to early learning for three- and four-year old children, teacher unions, school district officials, and school-centric institutions like MDE love to use K-12-style terms like “pre-k” “voluntary pre-k,” and “universal pre-k.” These terms convince politicians and the public that formalized K-12-like classroom settings and methods are required for three- and four-year old children.



However, that is not what the research says. The research is clear that three- and four-year-old children do best in small, informal play-based learning environments, which is what LFCCs excel at providing. Three- and four-year-old children are much too young for the kind of formal school classroom settings and methods that are too often the default approach for K-12 officials. Therefore, we need to remove the K-12-style language from this discussion. Minnesota does not need a formalized school-centric one-size-fits-all pre-k system and it is misleading to create the impression to parents that it does. We need more 1) parent-directed supports for three- and four-year-old children so that parents can choose programs from a true mixed delivery system to find the program that is right for their family and 2) clear communication to parents that ALL options, specifically including LFCC providers who have been publicly disparaged in the recent past, can provide the kinds of experiences and supports that children need to be ready for school and all that follows.

Signed by Minnesota Child Care Provider Information Network Board Members, May 15, 2021

THREE- AND
FOUR-YEAR-OLD
CHILDREN DO
BEST IN SMALL,
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WHICH IS WHAT
LFCCS EXCEL AT
PROVIDING.

MUSIC IS ALL AROUND US

*"The Music
is all
around us,
all you
have to do
is listen"*

*Nick
Castle,
August
Rush*

Music can benefit children in many areas: language, math, concentration, and social skills. Children who grow up listening to music develop strong music-related connections in the brain. Music enhances the brain function in children and listening to music stimulates the brain.

Children of all ages express themselves through music. According to Live Science Researchers, babies prefer to listen to the beat of music over speech. Have you ever noticed that when you turn on music a baby will start to bounce up and down, a toddler will wiggle their butt and a preschooler will spin and do a form of break dancing. Children were born to dance.

According to ZERO TO THREE, music offers children opportunities to learn social-emotional skills such as self-regulation. When a child is being rocked to sleep, the soothing experience helps babies learn to soothe themselves.





TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH SONGS

An example is taking the tune of “Hokey Pokey,” which is familiar to most children, and adapting the lyrics to talk about how to calm down as in this version adapted from Margie La Bella’s Music Therapy & Education:

*You take a big breath in,
You take a big breath out,
You take a big breath in,
And again you let it all out,
You can focus on your breath,
You can learn to calm down,
That’s what it’s all about.*

TEACHING EARLY LITERACY THROUGH MUSIC

One of the easiest things caregivers can do to help young children get ready to read is to sing. The early literacy benefits of singing are numerous. John, Paul, George and Ringo are the best teachers of vocabulary and literacy. The Beatles lyrics are simple and easy to understand. The song “Hello, Goodbye” teaches about opposites: goodbye/hello, yes/no, high/low, stop/go.

Many songs also tell stories like “We’re Going on A Bear Hunt” which can reinforce narrative skills. Children do not care if you can’t carry a tune so sing out! They’ll love your enthusiasm and they’ll be learning too!

Music is one of the first ways children experience math. Steady beat is what you respond to when you hear music and start tapping your toe. The steady beat is repetitive and evenly spaced. Listen to “Old MacDonald,” “Bingo,” or “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” and you will hear the steady beat. You can count the beat and find the patterns: “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” for example, has three patterns repeated throughout the song. Music plays a powerful role in the lives of young children. The more music children are exposed to the better.

GIVE PARENTS OF LITTLEST LEARNERS MORE CHOICES, *save our child care industry while we're at it*

Cyndi Cunningham is an early educator who operates Growing Wings, LLC a licensed Parent Aware-rated program in St. Paul. This article was first published in Minnesota Reformer on May 11, 2021 <https://minnesotareformer.com>

The Minnesota House is on the verge of doing something very helpful for our most vulnerable children and the pandemic-devastated child care sector – investing in Early Learning Scholarships.

The House wants to give the Minnesota Commissioner of Education (MDE) the authority to spend as much as \$40 million more on something called “Pathway II Early Learning Scholarships.” Meanwhile, the Minnesota Senate is allocating \$146 million in federal COVID-19 relief funding for the original Pathway I Early Learning Scholarship model.

But it is one critically important numeral off. The difference may seem small to the casual observer, but it makes all the difference for the people the Legislature says it is trying to help. The difference is between Pathways I and Pathways II Scholarships.



THAT ONE NUMERAL
AFTER THE WORD
“PATHWAYS” MAKES ALL
THE DIFFERENCE FOR
DISADVANTAGED LOW-
INCOME CHILDREN AND
CHILD CARE PROVIDERS.



With the original Early Learning Scholarship model (Pathway I), parents are in the driver's seat. Parents with these Scholarships are empowered to choose from a variety of quality Parent Aware-rated programs located in homes, schools, centers, nonprofits or churches.

All of those programs have an equal opportunity to serve those families. And if the parents ever need to change programs, the Pathway I Scholarship is portable, meaning the parent can take their Scholarship to any quality program they want, without losing eligibility or having to do any additional paperwork. Pathway I Scholarships are flexible, fair, and portable.

Pathway II was created by MDE and it bears no resemblance to this original model that the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) piloted from 2005 to 2011. Unlike the original flexible and portable model that was proven effective by MELF, with the rigid Pathway II model parents don't get to choose from an array of different kinds of programs in their area.



Instead, a few officials at MDE control funding distribution. MDE distributes funding through an elaborate “request for proposals (RFP)” funding process that is so involved and complex that it effectively has become an earmark for large institutions that have the resources to pay professional grant writers— school districts and a few of the largest child care centers.

As a result, 66% of the Pathway II funding goes to school-based programs, 17% goes to centers, and only 0.4% goes to any of Minnesota’s 1,142 licensed, Parent Aware-rated family child care providers. In contrast, when parents with a Pathway I Scholarship are empowered to make their own choice, only 12 percent choose school-based programs.

There are very valid reasons why low-income parents choose quality programs like ours, when they are allowed to do so. Many parents need a program closer to their home, transit stop, or job. Many parents work full-time, so a school-based program that has part-time hours and is closed in the summer just doesn’t work for them.

Many parents have more than one child under age five, and need or want a single drop-off and pick-up, which isn’t possible with school-based that don’t serve babies and toddlers. Many families want a provider familiar with their culture, and home-based providers come from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are under-represented in school-based programs. Many parents prefer the smaller settings and nurturing approach that quality home-based programs like ours offer.

By the way, the Pathway II approach is also out of step with national trends. For instance, the Biden Administration has said that quality home-based programs should be a choice available to parents of preschoolers. Pathway I Scholarships are the only Minnesota funding stream for preschool aged education that offers that option to families.



At a time when we have a serious shortage in child care, Minnesotans need “all hands on deck” to serve children who need care, including the 35,000 low-income Minnesota children under age five who currently can’t access quality early learning programs. Pathway I gives Minnesota an inclusive all hands on deck strategy, but the rigid Pathway II model doesn’t.

There’s also the critically important issue of “portability.” When a parent with a child in Pathway II program changes jobs or homes, and therefore needs to change child care programs, their child can get cut off from their Scholarship funding. Consequently, the child loses their learning and care continuity, often permanently because there are often long waiting list for Scholarships and other types of help. Children don’t get cut off from learning and care with the portable Pathway I model, but they do with the Pathway II approach.

There’s also the issue of targeting the most at-risk children. State law identifies the following children as its top priorities for assistance: Children experiencing homelessness, in foster care, in the child protection system, and with teen parents. Those children are Minnesota’s top priority because they’re the most at-risk of not being prepared for school and experiencing other difficulties.



Flexible, portable Pathway I Scholarships work well for those children, as evidenced by the fact that 55 percent of Pathway I funding is going to them. Meanwhile, only 8% of Pathway II funding is going those top priority children.

Finally, leaders also talk a lot about the critical need to do better serving children early in life, when their brains are rapidly developing and learning gaps are just beginning to open. But our leaders’ words aren’t consistent with their actions. After all, 40% of Pathway I funding goes to infants and toddlers, while only 7% of Pathway II funding goes to our littlest learners. Yet House leaders want to expand Pathway II at the expense of Pathway I?



If you care about investing in children earlier in life, reaching the most vulnerable children, maintaining learning and care continuity for children, providing an equal opportunity for all types of child care providers, bringing “all hands on deck” during a severe child care shortage, or giving parents flexibility to find programs that best fit their lives and preferences, then you will understand that Pathway I Scholarships work much better than Pathway II for all.

MDE created Pathway II at a time when it claimed it was concerned there weren’t enough Parent Aware-rated programs to meet parents’ needs. At the time, MDE leadership promised Pathway II would be a temporary program. Back then, there were 529 rated programs. Eight years later, there are 2,888 rated programs. If there ever was a need for Pathway II, the need now is long gone.

Because school districts and teacher unions are very powerful at the State Capitol, they have several funding streams that are dedicated exclusively to them – School Readiness, School Readiness Plus, and Voluntary Pre-k. We are not calling for the elimination of their exclusive funding streams, though they’re also inequitable. All we ask is that we have an equal opportunity to compete with school-based programs for parents using Early Learning Scholarships.

So, if the early education debate is really about helping the most vulnerable children and the devastated child care sector, and not about earmarking yet another funding stream for powerful special interests, the Legislature and Governor should eliminate the Pathway II model and redistribute the funding to the original Pathway I Scholarship model. If lawmakers won’t eliminate Pathway II, they should at least stop diverting new money to this problematic approach.

Meet Your Officers

Hi! My name is Lisa Lindboe and I am the MCCPIN membership chair. I have two daughters and live in Fridley with my dogs Dez and Tinkerbelle.

I started my child care business in 1995 and in 2013 chose the name Happy Hearts Rock! Being a part of the lives of the little ones I care for is a joy to me. I love that they trust me and share their feelings and what's going on at home. I am always looking for ways to better myself and my program and am proud to have earned a 3-star rating through Parent Aware.

I became involved with MCCPIN when asked to be a part of something that was expanding. I started as regional representative where I worked to bring inexpensive trainings to the area and work with another county to do a Super Saturday event. In July 2020, I became Membership Chair. I'm proud to be a part of an organization that provides so many benefits to child care providers.



Lisa Lindboe

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Board of Director Meetings: Next board meeting will be June 19th via Zoom. Meetings are typically held the third Saturday of every month. If you wish to be included in the notification, please email MCCPINpresident@gmail.com so the links can be sent to you.