

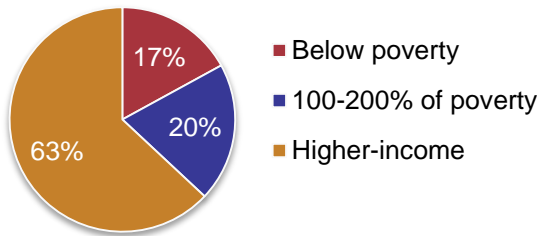
How we can close the early learning access gap for low-income children in Minnesota



Investments in effective early learning for children living in low-income families pay back over a lifetime of healthy behaviors and productive employment. Ensuring that high-need young children can access effective early learning programs is both the right and the smart policy decision.

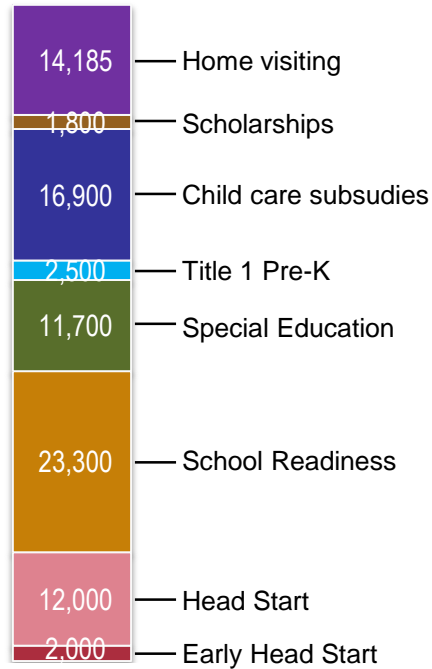
In Minnesota, more than one-third of children age 5 and younger – 156,000 children – live in low-income households at or below 200 percent of poverty (about \$44,000 for a family of four). In communities of color, the percentage of low-income children exceeds 60 percent.

**NUMBER OF MINNESOTA CHILDREN AGE 0-5:
TOTAL 427, 000**

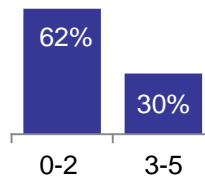


Minnesota spends nearly \$500 million per year in state (57%) and federal (43%) dollars to provide child development and early care and education services to an estimated 84,000 low-income children, leaving a gap of at least 46 percent between the number of children who could benefit from services and those receiving them. The access gap for children age 2 and younger is at least 62 percent, compared with about 30 percent for children ages 3-5. These access gaps may be even higher due to overlaps in program participation that cannot be unduplicated when counting the number of children served.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HIGH-NEED CHILDREN BEING SERVED: TOTAL 84,385



ACCESS GAP BY AGE GROUP



Note: Of the 156,000 low-income children, about 76,000 children are age 0-2 and 80,000 children are age 3-5.

If we expect healthy child development, we must close this access gap with worthwhile opportunities. This brief describes four options to expand access for low-income children to early learning opportunities and summarizes the available child development outcomes associated with each.

Invest Early: Private support to expand and improve the public system of care

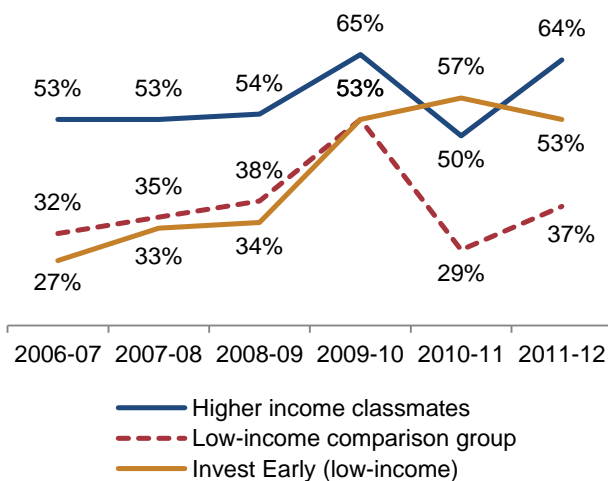
A community collaboration of the Itasca County Area Schools, Invest Early blends public funding (Head Start, School Readiness, CCAP) with a Blandin Foundation grant of \$1.5 million annually to provide Head Start infant/toddler and preschool classrooms with wraparound services.

Invest Early aims to improve children’s school readiness by improving the system of early childhood screening, care, and education; strengthening and empowering families; and promoting healthy child development.

Based on evaluation results over the past six years, Invest Early effectively prepares low-income children with multiple risk factors for school success.

Kindergarten entry results show the proficiency gap between Invest Early participants and higher-income children is closing, and that Invest Early participants were one and a half times as likely as the comparison group to be prepared for kindergarten.

PREPARED FOR KINDERGARTEN



Scholarships: Making quality care affordable to low-income families



The Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program, a showpiece market-driven pilot of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF), has assisted

348 low-income children age 3 and 4 to attend eligible high-quality early learning programs. The scholarships paid \$13,000 for full-time center care and \$9,360 for full-time licensed family home care. They were used mostly in centers (57%) and Head Start programs (30%), followed by family child care homes (9%), and public school-based programs (4%).

After two years of participation in the early learning programs using the MELF scholarships, children gained early literacy skills and, to a lesser extent, math and social skills according to an evaluation by SRI International. For the most part, children on scholarships were developmentally at or near age level at kindergarten entry and scored better than their comparison peers with regard to social competencies.

The evaluation by SRI International also found that, compared with the state-funded child care subsidy program, the scholarships, as intended, supported better care than the families could otherwise afford and greater continuity of care, helping children stay enrolled (according to providers, 93% vs. 70%).

The Minnesota Legislature has appropriated \$4 million dollars over two years to fund \$4,000 scholarships for about 500 low-income children per year. In addition, Minnesota’s Early Learning Challenge Grant will support two-year scholarships to high-quality programs for about 1,300 low-income children.

School Readiness Connections: Promoting quality and adding flexibility to state subsidies

The Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) currently provides financial subsidies to help low-income families ensure children are well cared for and prepared for kindergarten while parents work, pursue employment, or are enrolled in classes leading to employment. However, the subsidies can be used without regard to quality ratings, have rate limits that may result in parent co-pays, and stop when parents are not employed or fulfilling welfare-to-work requirements.

About 21,000 children age 5 and younger received some type of child care through CCAP in 2010. As of December 2011, 7,500 families, three-quarters of whom live in the metro area, were on a CCAP waiting list.

In 2007, the Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$1 million to establish the School Readiness Connections pilot, which provided funds to pay higher rates than allowed under CCAP and allowed for continuity of care because the subsidies were not tied to the parent's employment status. The pilot, which served 364 children in 14 programs (9 centers and 5 licensed family child care programs), met its goals to create incentives for child care programs with high concentrations of CCAP children to provide services that support school readiness and incentives for families receiving CCAP subsidies to choose quality child care. On average, children participated for 36 weeks, and providers received about \$55 more per week than under CCAP.

As reported in an evaluation by SRI International, based on developmental assessments of fifty 4-year-old children using Work Sampling 3 to 6 months prior to kindergarten entry, the percentage of children who rated proficient were:

- 92% in physical development
- 82% in personal and social development
- 78% in language and literacy
- 72% in mathematical thinking



Targeted Home Visiting

Minnesota allocates about \$8 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to local public health departments and tribal governments on a formula basis to support family home visiting by nurses and/or trained home visitors following a public health nursing assessment of family risk and resiliency factors. Improved school readiness, family health, positive parenting, and resiliency in children are among the goals of the Family Home Visiting Program, which serves families at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines and who have other risk factors associated with inadequate parent-child relationships and poor outcomes for children. A statewide evaluation, initiated in 2009, has described how enhanced TANF funds have improved programs and service delivery, but has not yet produced a report of program outcomes. In 2010, the Minnesota Department of Health reports that 16,134 children age 0-6 received public health home visiting; 86 percent were age 2 and younger.

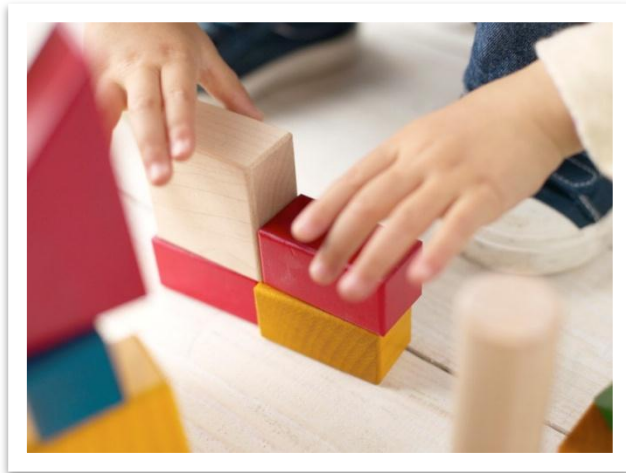
The Metro Alliance for Healthy Families (MAHF) is a family home visiting program serving parents who live in the nine county Twin Cities region with funding from the counties, foundations, and the Greater Twin Cities United Way. The program serves parents who are expecting for the first time or whose first baby is younger than 3 months of age.

Based on serving more than 600 first-time parents during 2011, MAHF found that after 15 or more visits in a 12 month period, most of the children who were at risk for developmental issues were on track developmentally, including:

- 77% in cognitive and physical development
- 90% in behavioral/emotional development
- 92% in immunizations

Other options

Expanding these four options are by no means the only ways to close the access gap. Other options to consider include establishing an endowment fund to support access to early learning or funding early learning directly through low-income tax credits. Solutions to successfully close the gap must be based on a community's demographics, be flexible, and fit local needs and resources, and may require using a combination of options.



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