



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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AMSD Position on Early Childhood Education

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts supports expanding access to school-based prekindergarten programs. Funding for prekindergarten programs must be sufficient to ensure essential program components including licensed teachers, support staff, transportation and sufficient classroom space.

AMSD BELIEVES

- Preschool education is a critical educational strategy to ensure all children are ready for kindergarten.
- School-based early learning programs provide the highest likelihood of success in preparing children to enter kindergarten with the skills, behavior and knowledge needed to progress and flourish.
- School districts must have the flexibility to design the programs that best meet the needs of their students and families.
- Funding should continue to be available to support the school readiness program to allow school districts to meet the needs of at-risk three year olds.

BACKGROUND

Minnesota was ahead of the curve in 1992 when it first established the School Readiness Program. In fact, Minnesota's School Readiness Program has been a nation-leading example of how high-quality, school-based early learning programs can close the achievement gap and ensure that all students are

prepared for kindergarten. The 1992 legislation required school districts to use the funds to serve at-risk three and four year olds and prepare them for success in kindergarten. Children in school-based programs are involved in a variety of learning experiences that prepare them to enter kindergarten with the skills, behavior and knowledge needed to be successful. For FY 2018-19, the School Readiness Program is expected to serve more than 21,000 children who are 3 to 5 years old.

The Legislature and Governor have approved significant investments in early learning in recent years including investments in the Early Childhood Family Education Program, School Readiness and Early Learning Scholarships. Funding for School Readiness has nearly tripled since FY2015, from \$11.9 million to \$33.6 million for FY2019. Head Start saw increases to \$25.1 million in 2015, and Early Learning Scholarships have more than doubled from \$27.6 million in 2015 to \$70.2 million in 2019.

During the 2016 legislative session, a statewide Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) grant program was enacted. The program is for children who are four years

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old on September 1 of the school year in which they enroll. The program is formula-driven with eligible pupils generating up to 0.6 per pupil under the school funding formula. Funding is available in four categories - Minneapolis and St. Paul School Districts; metro suburban districts; non-metro districts; and charter schools - and is prioritized based on the number of kindergarten students eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch and the proximity of three and four-star rated Parent Aware programs. The Minnesota Department of Education received 184 complete applications including applications from 27 AMSD districts of which 15 were approved.

A new early learning program, School Readiness Plus, was created during the 2017 legislative session. The program targets four year olds demonstrating one or more risk factors. School Readiness Plus is one-time funding for FY 2018 and FY 2019 only. In addition, the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten cap was changed from a limit on the total state aid entitlement to a limit on the number of participants. For FY 2018, there is a combined cap of 6,160 participants - 3,160 for the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program and 3,000 for the School Readiness Plus Program. In FY 2019, the cap is increased to 7,160. For FY 2020 and later, the School Readiness Plus Program sunsets and the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten cap is returned to the FY 2017 level of 3,160.