



## Association of Metropolitan School Districts

2 Pine Tree Drive, Suite 380, Arden Hills, MN 55112 • 612-430-7750 • www.amsd.org

# Position on Early Childhood Education

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

## AMSD BELIEVES

- Preschool education is critical 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

During the 2016 legislative session, a statewide Voluntary PreKindergarten (VPK) grant program was enacted. The program was created for children who are four years old on Sept. 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.

Beginning in FY 17, about \$25 million per year was appropriated through the regular school aid formulas to school districts for VPK, which divides the state into regions wherein each school site is prioritized based on its percent of free and reduced

lunch eligible kindergarten students. The statewide appropriation is split among the four regions based on each region's proportionate share of kindergarten pupils, and the initial VPK program served about 3,160 students per year. On average, the funding (state aid and local levy) for each VPK student amounts to roughly \$10,000.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, the State also enacted the School Readiness Plus (SRP) program, which is similar to VPK in many of the services it provides. VPK and SRP were both established with one-time funding for FY 18 and FY 19, with SRP serving an additional 4,000 students per year.

In the years that have followed, the Legislature and Governor have approved significant additional early learning investments. The 2023 Education Bill provided permanent funding for the expiring SRP and VPK seats, along with funding for an additional 3,000 seats in FY 25 — as well as 2,200 more seats in FY 26-27, for a total of 12,360 permanent seats. Funding for School Readiness has nearly tripled since FY 15, from \$11.9 million to \$33.6 million annually. The 2023 Education Bill also provides Head Start with increases of \$10 million per year through FY 27, and funding for Early Learning Scholarships increased \$252 million in FY24-25 and \$58 million in FY 26-27.

State policymakers should build on this progress and continue to expand access to high quality early learning programs.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.house.mn.gov/hrd/pubs/mnschfin.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/EARLYEDUCATION.AidAppropriations.pdf>