Why Quality Early Childhood Programs Matter to Economic Developers

Promoting Quality Early Childhood Education across Minnesota

Goals for Today

• Explain value of quality early childhood programs to the strength of our communities’ economies
• Understand the networks of support available to strengthen quality programs
• Consider how economic developers can advance this cause in their communities

Who Is Think Small?

• 43 year old non-profit
  • 90 employees
  • $10 million budget in Twin Cities Area
• Helps parents find quality child care
• Trains thousands of child care professionals
• Redleaf Press publishes materials for early learning professionals
• Promotes good public policy
Early Childhood & Economic Development

- Early learning is the foundation of all educational success
- Skilled workforce is the key for Minnesota’s future prosperity
- Well-documented analysis of the return on investment

Figure 1: Gross Receipts by Industry, Minnesota, in millions

Figure 2: Employment by Industry, Minnesota

Licensed teacher PFTP's in elementary schools, 2003-04 school year, Minnesota Dept. of Education. All employment figures via Minnesota’s Workforce Investment Board. All data via Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development, National Employment-Balances, fourth quarter 2004, and child care, which is labor force findings in this report.
Why Does School Readiness Matter?

- Provides the foundation of school success; 3rd grade reading, graduation, etc.
- Develops children’s skills; not just academic but social-emotional, a.k.a. character
- 90 percent of a person’s brain development occurs in the first five years
  - New research emphasizing importance of earliest years

Why Does School Readiness Matter?

- Public safety impacts when academic struggles lead to a life on the edge and prison
- High percentage of young adults cannot qualify for military service
- Human service costs when people require services throughout their lives

The Situation in Minnesota

- We are among the top 2 states with two parents working outside the home
- 50 percent of entering kindergartners are not fully prepared for school success
- There are 1,638 licensed centers serving 61,501 kids; 9,732 family centers serving 74,154. Family child care is particularly important in Greater Minnesota
  - Need high-quality care, especially for children facing the steepest obstacles
Hopeful Developments

• The public and policy-makers are increasingly aware and supportive
• New initiatives like Parent Aware and Early Learning Scholarships

What Child Care Providers are Saying


Is There a Role for the Economic Developers to Help?

• Connect into Initiative Foundations and local networks
• Strengthen the businesses represented by early learning providers: First Children’s Finance
  • Connect with http://greaterthanmn.org/
• Become an advocate and local voice for this critical economic development infrastructure
The Possible Pay-Off

- More kids are better prepared for school and success in life
- More people are productively engaged in work, family, and civic life
- More competitive businesses and a stronger economy

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