

VII. COMPETITION PRIORITIES

Note about the Absolute Priority: The absolute priority describes items that a State must address in its application in order to receive a grant. Applicants do not write a separate response to this priority. Rather, they address this priority throughout their responses to the selection criteria. Applications must meet the absolute priority to be considered for funding. A State meets the absolute priority if a majority of reviewers determines that the State has met the absolute priority

Priority 1: Absolute Priority – Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs.

To meet this priority, the State’s application must comprehensively and coherently address how the State will build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The State’s application must demonstrate how it will improve the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs by integrating and aligning resources and policies across Participating State Agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. In addition, to achieve the necessary reforms, the State must make strategic improvements in those specific reform areas that will most significantly improve program quality and outcomes for Children with High Needs. Therefore, the State must address those criteria from within each of the Focused Investment Areas (sections (C) Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children, (D) A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and (E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress) that it believes will best prepare its Children with High Needs for kindergarten success.

Note about Competitive Preference Priorities: Competitive preference priorities can earn the applicant extra or “competitive preference” points.

Priority 2: Competitive Preference Priority – Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. (10 points)

Competitive Preference Priority 2 is designed to increase the number of children from birth to kindergarten entry who are participating in programs that are governed by the State's licensing system and quality standards, with the goal that all licensed or State-regulated programs will participate. The State will receive points for this priority based on the extent to which the State has in place, or has a High-Quality Plan to implement no later than June 30, 2015--

(a) A licensing and inspection system that covers all programs that are not otherwise regulated by the State and that regularly care for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; provided that if the State exempts programs for reasons other than the number of children cared for, the State may exclude those entities and reviewers will score this priority only on the basis of non-excluded entities; and

(b) A Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System in which all licensed or State-regulated Early Learning and Development Programs participate.

If the State chooses to respond to this competitive preference priority, the State shall write its full response in the text box below. The State may also include any additional information it believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. If the State has included relevant attachments in the Appendix, these should be described in the narrative below and clearly cross-referenced to allow the reviewers to locate them easily.

In scoring this priority, peer reviewers will determine, based on the evidence the State submits, whether each element of the priority is implemented or planned; the quality of the implementation or plan (see the definition of a High-Quality Plan for the components reviewers will be judging); and the extent to which the different types of Early Learning and Development Programs in the State are included and addressed. The State is responsible for providing clear and detailed information to assist the peer reviewers in making these determinations.

Priority 2 Narrative

Parent Aware, Minnesota's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (described in detail in B) is a voluntary system that includes all licensed and state regulated programs: Head Start, family and center-based child care, and private and public preschool programs. The Plan described below seeks to target additional intensive supports for Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers, who provide informal, legal, unlicensed child care. These supports will create pathways for FFNs to achieve higher levels of quality of care in order to improve developmental outcomes of Children with High Needs. Minnesota has led the way in conducting research and obtaining legislative support for FFN caregivers, and this Plan is built on that robust foundation of research, as well as on Early Childhood Family Education, Minnesota's nationally recognized parent education program. The research studies noted here allow us to chart a path to increase quality in these settings and help interested FFN caregivers, including new immigrants, become licensed and eligible for Parent Aware rating.

Four studies exploring various aspects of FFN care provide the foundation for this Plan (Chase, Arnold, Schauben, & Shardlow, 2006; Chase, Arnold, & Schauben, 2006; Tout, & Zaslow, 2006; Vang, 2006). The survey results from Chase, et al., suggest an estimated 150,000 households in Minnesota provide child care for family, friends, or neighbors. On average, FFN caregivers usually care for two children other than their own on a regular basis, with most providing care for free. Key consistent findings from the studies, relevant to this Plan, include:

- FFN caregivers are interested in information on child development, improving the learning environment in the home, and receiving basic materials and suggestions for safe, stimulating and fun activities.
- FFN providers value learning opportunities that connect them to resources, that are delivered in the provider's home language and through neighborhoods and FFN informal networks, and that are located in informal settings (i.e., homes, ethnic organizations, community centers).
- FFN providers are a valuable and diverse part of the child care system with inherent strengths and an interest in improving quality.

Following this research, Minnesota became the first state to pass legislation (Minnesota Statutes 119B.232) to establish a FFN grant program to promote children's early literacy, healthy development, and school readiness, and to foster community partnerships to promote children's

school readiness. Six grantees from community and tribal organizations were initially funded for two years (fiscal years 2008-2009) to work exclusively with FFN caregivers. Their work operationalized many of the recommendations outlined in the previously discussed research. After the first two years, the program was extended for fiscal years 2010 to 2011, using ARRA funds. Four grantees have indicated that they will continue to provide some level of services to FFN providers beyond fiscal year 2011, due to the sustainable partnerships generated by this program. Along with the study results and recommendations described above, an evaluation of the FFN Grant program also informs Minnesota's High-Quality Plan (Susman-Stillman & Stout, 2009). One of the key findings, consistent with long-held assumptions, is that FFN caregivers are diverse in terms of culture, languages spoken, immigrant status, and education levels.

In 2009, the Department of Human Services, recognizing the significant role of culture and linguistic communities in FFN care, supported a feasibility study on creating a network for new American child care providers. The report recommended the following:

- Create a culturally appropriate network for New American child care providers who are licensed;
- Develop workshops and educational seminars on specific topics: legal, licensing, health, safety, and business topics;
- Create an advisory board to guide the New American Child Care Provider Network; and
- Identify a central agency/group that will organize or facilitate the first three years of the network.

Minnesota has continually supported the role of FFN providers, with resources flowing through local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&Rs) and other statewide agencies, such as Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota, to support play and learn groups; home visiting; and community cafes, facilitated discussions that engage parents and providers in learning about and putting into practice the five protective factors of the Strengthening Families approach. The protective factors are: knowledge of parenting and child development, parent resilience, social and emotional competence, concrete supports in times of need, and social connections. Given the high percentages of children in FFN care, linking FFN providers to additional quality improvement opportunities may exponentially increase positive child outcomes. One means of making that connection is a new statutory training requirement for FFN caregivers serving children who

receive Child Care Assistance. In addition, Minnesota is ready to move forward in creating these linkages by utilizing two of our nationally renowned programs: Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and the Minnesota Parents Know website. Each provides parents and other caregivers with access to information on the health, development, and wellbeing of young children. Each program offers the opportunity for meaningful instruction and peer-to-peer discussion, centered on the health and development of young children as well.

Early Childhood Family Education

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is the largest and oldest program of its kind in the nation and represents Minnesota's most significant investment in engaging and supporting families. ECFE began in 1974 as a pilot program with \$230,000 in legislative funding. In fiscal year 2010, ECFE served over 128,062 parents and 122,123 children (unduplicated counts) from birth to kindergarten enrollment, and received approximately \$43,634,000 (FY2010) in state and local funding. Through the ECFE program, licensed parent educators are available in each of Minnesota's 339 school districts and in four Tribal Schools. Program staff design and implement programming that is responsive to local needs, including the cultural and linguistic make-up of communities. Focus areas have included fathering, parenting as a new American, and parenting children with special needs. Additionally, most school districts also offer an ECFE home visiting program that is designed to reach isolated or at-risk families.

Minnesota Parents Know

The award-winning Minnesota Parents Know website is a key state strategy to increase access to information about health, development, learning, and screening. The site provides research-based child development and parenting information, starting at birth and continuing through grade 12. The site is operated by the Department of Education, in partnership with other state agencies, Tufts University, and the Working Family Resource Center, an organization that supports parents in their workplaces. Minnesota Parents Know incorporates innovative technologies, including weekly podcasts, monthly webinars, and quarterly live chats that feature local and national experts on child development, parenting, and health topics. Other strategies include email newsletters, parent discussion forums, and an interactive child development scrapbook.

HIGH-QUALITY PLAN

Minnesota's High-Quality Plan focuses on increasing the number of FFN caregivers who improve quality of care by becoming licensed (and thereby eligible to participate in Parent Aware) or by implementing research-based practices to enhance other aspects of caregiving in these informal settings. More specifically, Minnesota's Plan targets new American immigrant providers in achieving and maintaining a current child care license and targets FFN caregivers receiving a Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy through new statutorily established training requirements. (Currently, the requirement may be found at 2011 Minnesota Laws 1st Special Session, chapter 9, article 1, section 6, and will be codified at Minnesota Statutes section 119B.125, subdivision 1b.) In addition, Minnesota's ECFE program provides FFN caregivers with parenting education and information about increasing the quality of caregiving and the licensed child care system. The goals and activities build on Minnesota's experiences and evaluation of working with new American immigrants and FFN providers.

GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

Goal 1: Create a network for new American immigrants to learn about becoming a licensed child care provider and for existing providers to learn how to gain access to quality improvement supports through Parent Aware, thus enhancing the quality of their care to promote school readiness.

Activity 1.1: Identify new American immigrant providers who are currently licensed or who are potential candidates to become licensed family child care providers (making them eligible for Parent Aware participation).

The Department of Human Services contracts with Resources for Child Caring, the CCR&R district that serves the Minneapolis/St. Paul and suburban metropolitan area. In fiscal years 2012 and 2013, this entity will use an existing grant to engage in community outreach strategies to identify new American immigrants who express interest in becoming licensed family child care providers or participating in a network of providers.

Activity 1.2: Provide training opportunities to new American immigrant providers.

Resources for Child Caring will provide training for new American immigrant providers to raise the quality of their care. As identified in the four 2006 studies cited above, initial training topics may include basic child development, safety and health, creating a learning environment for children, or meeting requirements to receive payment in the child care assistance program.

The metro-area CCR&R will also provide training on licensing requirements and the process to become licensed to those who are interested, and information about the benefits and supports that Parent Aware offers to licensed family child care providers. Trainings will be offered in English, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali.

Activity 1.3: Facilitate a peer network for American immigrant providers who are currently licensed or are actively pursuing a family child care licensure.

Resources for Child Caring will facilitate a network for new American immigrant providers who are currently licensed and those who are interested in becoming licensed. The network will collect feedback about specific needs of this sector of caregivers, and provide support and information on the benefits Parent Aware offers licensed family child care providers. Groups would be offered in the host language of the immigrant providers.

Activity 1.4: Assess whether these same services could be expanded statewide. Evaluate the experience of implementing Activities 1-3 and their influence on retention and turnover rates and consider statewide expansion of these activities. Identify areas in Greater Minnesota where new Americans have settled and assess whether there is a need and interest in having similar services in those locations. Assess whether current resources could support expansion to identified areas around the state.

Goal 2: Assist FFN caregivers who receive Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy in meeting statutorily established training requirements.

This goal seeks to assist FFN caregivers who receive Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy in meeting statutory training requirements, as identified in MN Statute 119B.125.

Activity 2.1: Provide CPR and First Aid training to FFN providers.

Effective November 1, 2011, new providers will need to receive First Aid and CPR training prior to becoming authorized to receive Child Care Assistance payments. On January 1, 2012, all FFN providers will need to meet this requirement prior to receiving authorization. Child Care Development Fund money will be reallocated to help CCR&R agencies meet this requirement.

Activity 2.2: Develop an eight-hour training series on the Core Competencies for FFN providers to support ongoing training requirements.

Once a provider meets the initial First Aid and CPR requirement, they must attend an additional eight hours of approved training each time they renew an authorization. By June 2013, the Department of Human Service plans to create a series of trainings specifically for FFN providers. The training will be at the foundational level of the Career Lattice (Minnesota's progression of degrees and credentials (see D1)), placing caregivers who opt in on a career pathway to becoming licensed. The following topics will be included: sudden infant death syndrome, abusive head trauma (shaken baby), child development, car seat/passenger restraint, cultural dynamics, and supporting children with disabilities. The training will also provide information on licensing requirements and the process to become licensed to those who are interested, as well as information about the opportunities Parent Aware offers to licensed family child care providers. The CCR&R system will assist FFN providers and counties to identify training that best meets the needs of a particular provider. Training will be refined so it is culturally and linguistically appropriate for those providers. Trainings offered through the CCR&R system are offered in English, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali.

Goal 3: Using ECFE licensed parent educators and early childhood teachers, to provide parenting education and family opportunities for FNN caregivers to improve the school readiness for Children with High Needs.

Activity 3.1: Expand access to Early Childhood Family Education.

Through a diverse set of options for FFN caregivers—such as small groups, presentations, coaching and support, and traditional adult/child interaction and parenting classes—ECFE parent educators and early childhood teachers will help provide connections to and information about community resources, Minnesota Parents Know, literacy and language development opportunities, child development, and identification of early learning or development concerns of young children. In partnership with DHS, the Department of Education will provide guidance to ECFE programs to initiate outreach and support to FFN caregivers.

Activity 3.2: Connect FFN caregivers in CCAP to the licensing system, local public health, and the school district, including Early Childhood Screening and ECFE.

ECFE is a vital local partner in their community and is available in every school district. These factors make ECFE parent educators effective outreach partners. Outreach to identified caregivers will be conducted in concert with CCR&R agencies. In conjunction with the Departments of Human Services and Health, local public health services, and the CCR&R

system, the ECFE program will create a “connection toolkit” for FFN caregivers that includes opportunities offered to licensed family child care providers through Parent Aware and information about the licensing system, mandated Early Childhood Screening program, and local resources.

Activity 3.3: Assess barriers and opportunities for family support and parenting education services for FFN caregivers. Identify areas throughout rural Minnesota where FFN providers are giving care and do not have access to family support and parenting education services through ECFE. Assess how current ECFE resources could be expanded or modified to support the identified needs of caregivers.

Activity 3.4: Promote FFN caregiver access to parenting, child development and health information through Minnesota Parents Know.

Working with CCR&R networks, ECFE programs will provide information about statewide family support and parenting education available online including Minnesota Parents Know, Help Me Grow referral, Department of Education/Working Family Resource Center webinars and Parent to Parent Live Chats, *Early Learning Digest*, and MomEnough™ weekly podcasts.

Goal 3 seeks to maximize the well-documented and evaluated strengths of the ECFE program (Mueller, 1992; Mueller, 1996; Minnesota Department of Education, 1999; Mueller, Armson, & Rader, 2003) while targeting efforts to reach Children with High Needs through their FFN caregivers. Additionally, the High-Quality Plan will build an approach to support the licensed parent educator workforce to better represent the families in the communities in which they work.

Realistic Timeline

	2012				2013				2014				2015			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Goal 1: Create New Immigrant Network																
1.1 Identify New Immigrant Providers (licensing candidates)																
1.2 Provide Training																
1.3 Facilitate Peer Network																
1.4 Explore Statewide Expansion																
Goal 2: Assist LNL Providers in Meeting																

	2012				2013				2014				2015			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Training Requirements																
2.1 Provide CPR and First Aid Training																
2.2 Develop and deliver foundational Core Competencies Training																
Goal 3: Parenting education for FFN																
3.1 Expand Access to ECFE																
3.2 Connection toolkit																
3.3 Assess barriers & opportunities																
3.4 Access to MN Parents Know																

Responsible Parties

Goal 1, Activities 1-3 will be carried out in partnership with Resources for Child Caring. Activity 4 will be completed by key staff in the Department of Human Services using evaluation data.

Goal 2, Activity 1 will be accomplished by the statewide CCR&R system, the Department of Human Services, Child Development Services division, will complete Activity 2, and Activity 3 will be implemented by staff from the Department of Education.

Goal 3, Activity 1 will involve key staff at the Departments of Education and Human Services and ECFE directors and staff from school districts throughout the state. Activity 2 will also involve ECFE staff members who will work in partnership with staff from local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies. Activity 3 will involve staff from the Department of Education, local ECFE program staff, and FFN caregivers.

Appropriate Financial Resources

\$196,000 Public Funds (State General Fund)

\$158,112 ELC Grant Funds

\$354,112 TOTAL 4 Year Project Cost

For more detail on this budget, please see A4 and related budget spreadsheets.

Supporting Evidence

Appendices: None.

Performance Measures

FFN providers who become licensed and voluntarily participate in the Parent Aware TQRIS are reflected in Performance Measure Table B4c1 in Selection Criteria B4.

Addressing Needs of Different Types of ELD Programs

Minnesota is including both licensed and legally unlicensed—or Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) providers—in our state’s comprehensive plan to help all ELD Programs provide quality child care to children.

Meeting Needs of Children with High Needs (Including Special Populations)

The goals and activities target FFN providers who care for Children with High Needs, especially those who are recent immigrants. Descriptions of how participation in the Parent Aware Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System helps meet needs of special populations and Children with High Needs generally is provided throughout Selection Criteria B.

Priority 3: Competitive Preference Priority – Understanding the Status of Children’s Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry. (10 points)

To meet this priority, the State must, in its application--

(a) Demonstrate that it has already implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1) by indicating that all elements in Table (A)(1)-12 are met; or

(b) Address selection criterion (E)(1) and earn a score of at least 70 percent of the maximum points available for that criterion.

For Competitive Preference Priority 3, a State will earn all ten (10) competitive preference priority points if a majority of reviewers determines that the State has met the competitive preference priority. A State earns zero points if a majority of reviewers determines that the applicant has not met the competitive preference priority.

Applicants do not write a separate response to this priority. Rather, applicants address Competitive Preference Priority 3 either in Table (A)(1)-12 or by writing to selection criterion (E)(1).

Under option (a) below, an applicant does not earn competitive preference points if the reviewers determine that the State has not implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment that meets selection criterion (E)(1); under option (b) below, an applicant does not earn competitive preference points if the State earns a score of less than 70 percent of the maximum points available for selection criterion (E)(1).

Specify which option the State is taking:

X (a) Applicant has indicated in Table (A)(1)-12 that all of selection criterion (E)(1) elements are met. AND

X (b) Applicant has written to selection criterion (E)(1).

Note about Invitational Priorities: Invitational priorities signal areas the Departments are particularly interested in; however addressing these priorities will not earn applicants any additional points.

Priority 4: Invitational Priority – Sustaining Program Effects in the Early Elementary Grades.

The Departments are particularly interested in applications that describe the State’s High-Quality Plan to sustain and build upon improved early learning outcomes throughout the early elementary school years, including by--

(a) Enhancing the State’s current standards for kindergarten through grade 3 to align them with the Early Learning and Development Standards across all Essential Domains of School Readiness;

(b) Ensuring that transition planning occurs for children moving from Early Learning and Development Programs to elementary schools;

(c) Promoting health and family engagement, including in the early grades;

(d) Increasing the percentage of children who are able to read and do mathematics at grade level by the end of the third grade; and

(e) Leveraging existing Federal, State, and local resources, including but not limited to funds received under Title I and Title II of ESEA, as amended, and IDEA.

(Enter narrative here)

No funds requested and no response provided per federal guidance in Technical Assistance Workshop.

Priority 5: Invitational Priority – Encouraging Private-Sector Support

The Departments are particularly interested in applications that describe how the private sector will provide financial and other resources to support the State and its Participating State Agencies or Participating Programs in the implementation of the State Plan.

Priority 5 Narrative

Minnesota's vibrant private sector has a long history of success in demonstrably improving of the lives of Minnesota families and children. Private sector involvement in early childhood issues in Minnesota is deep and coordinated. Uniquely, this involvement is not limited to the non-profit and philanthropic arms of the sector, but includes strong engagement from private businesses. Each of the important elements of the private sector—foundations, businesses, and non-profits—is organized and working collaboratively to impact school readiness in Minnesota.

Foundations

Over 30 foundations statewide participate in Start Early: Funders for Children and Minnesota's Future (Start Early), a group that supports a collective policy agenda with the end goal of increased school readiness. In 2009, the foundations that make up Start Early invested nearly \$18 million in school readiness related efforts, and an estimated similar funding level is maintained today and will be committed into the future. The policy agenda that Start Early strives to achieve is supported by efforts at a variety of levels and involves much more than simple grant dispersion. Through strategic application of resources and leadership, coalition members have helped to propel Minnesota's recent, dramatic progress on issues related to school readiness. While the group's accomplishments are too numerous to account for fully here, key successes include successfully steering Minnesota's Early Learning Council to the comprehensive framework that provided strong direction for this application, and providing near-total funding for the Parent Aware pilot project. Through its public policy and advocacy work, the group also made significant contributions to planning for the establishment of Minnesota's Office of Early Learning. When state government ceased operations early this summer due to a budget impasse, Start Early member Greater Twin Cities United Way stepped up to create a Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge application webpage that provided information to interested community members and served as a rallying point by providing an opportunity for public input on best practices and other ideas for the State Plan. This leadership has continued

through to the application drafting efforts. The coalition has underwritten the grant writing and project management for this application and is providing extensive support for the related public input process.

Businesses

Minnesota business involvement on the issue of early learning was inspired by concerns about the state's future global competitiveness and took root in response to the release of a much-publicized study by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank. Researchers Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald demonstrated that a high return on investments is possible by prioritizing and investing in high-quality early education (2003). Influenced by the study's central finding that investments in early childhood development are a cost-effective form of economic development, CEOs of Minnesota's large companies—Cargill, Best Buy, and General Mills to name a few—teamed up with civic leaders to create the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF). Described as a research and development engine for early learning in Minnesota, MELF invested five years and \$20 million in rigorous research and evaluation to discover and describe cost-effective strategies for preparing Minnesota children for kindergarten. The investment included \$9 million to design and pilot Parent Aware, Minnesota's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System, and the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program, the first large-scale demonstration of the scholarship concept nationwide. In addition to extensive work on pilot projects, MELF invested \$4 million in research and evaluation that provides an extensive body of research (complete list in Appendix 48) on which Minnesota will continue to draw in the future.

MELF has completed its work and will sunset at the end of 2011. A new organization has emerged to fill the role of a hub for business involvement in issues related to school readiness: Parent Aware for School Readiness is an emerging nonprofit organization focused on using private sector strategies to improve school readiness in Minnesota. The organization is viewed as the next logical step for business involvement in early learning and is being established to protect the unique contributions of the business community to date—in particular a focus on outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and continuous improvement.

Nonprofits

Minnesota's Future is an active alliance of over 60 nonprofit and advocacy organizations statewide that share a collective policy agenda with child development and school readiness at its

heart. The alliance includes, among others, the Minnesota Child Care Association, the Minnesota Head Start Association, the Minnesota Coalition for Targeted Home Visiting, and Ready4K, a Minnesota nonprofit dedicated to grassroots advocacy for the betterment of Minnesota's youngest citizens. As part of the 2010 gubernatorial race, Minnesota's Future hosted a Candidate Forum that was attended by two major party candidates; it was the first ever of its kind focused on early childhood issues. Minnesota's Future also coordinates advocacy efforts at the State Capitol and has impacted a wide variety public policy decisions related to early childhood development, including the implementation of Parent Aware.

Involvement from these three super-organizations—the School Readiness Funders Coalition, Parent Aware for School Readiness, and the Minnesota's Future alliance—amounts to total representation of the private sector in efforts to improve the school readiness of Minnesota's children, particularly Children with High Needs. Minnesota's private sector stands ready to make immediate and concrete contributions to Minnesota's State Plan. Private sector efforts will be coordinated and focused on supporting Parent Aware, replicating best practices, and improving early literacy. In addition to contributing resources to support the main goals of the system, the private sector will provide leadership formally, by having a representative on the Governor's Early Learning Council, and informally, with continued public policy and advocacy efforts.

Supporting Parent Aware

As market penetration of Parent Aware increases statewide, Parent Aware for School Readiness (PASR) is committed to privately funding two strategies that proved invaluable during the Parent Aware pilot phase: promotion and evaluation. The program element that most distinguishes Parent Aware from other Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems nationwide is its focus on giving early education quality ratings to parents so that they use the information in their shopping, thus incenting all early learning providers, public and private, to improve and maintain their ratings and early education quality. Much as Consumer Reports ratings incent businesses to improve their products to win customers, quality improvement in the Parent Aware model is driven by market demand. PASR will invest significantly in marketing the importance of high-quality ELD Programs and the use of Parent Aware Ratings as a tool for selecting such programs. PASR has a planned annual marketing budget of \$500,000 plus in-kind support. It will provide 4-star programs statewide with marketing kits that include banners and other materials to promote their quality to families in their communities. In addition, PASR will

deploy internet and radio ads, strategies which resulted in dramatic increases in visits to the Parent Aware Ratings search website when pilot tested. Another tool that will be used for promotion is the business-developed website, www.IsYourChildReady.com. The site, created by Minnesota Business for Early Learning, helps parents determine whether their child is on track to be ready for school. The online quiz is currently distributed to working Minnesota parents through their employers. The site also refers parents to the Parent Aware Ratings search site.

In addition to its promotion efforts, PASR will invest \$250,000 per year in an evaluation of the Parent Aware ratings, as described in Section B5, to ensure that they continue to yield positive school readiness outcomes for children (an additional \$150,000 has been committed by Greater Twin Cities United Way to evaluate the Building Quality initiative). The final related function of Parent Aware for School Readiness will be to monitor Parent Aware to ensure that the unique and important contributions of the private sector are not lost over time.

Greater Twin Cities United Way will invest private funding in two projects to improve program quality. One of the projects will support approximately 350 child care centers across a nine-county region in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area in achieving high quality through attainment of a Parent Aware 3- or 4-star rating or accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Efforts will be focused on child care centers serving low-income families. When complete, approximately 85% of child care centers serving low-income children in the targeted geography will be able to demonstrate the highest level of quality to the families they serve. An additional program, Building Quality (see B2) will help center-based and licensed family child care programs get ready for entry into Parent Aware by providing training on Parent Aware approved curriculum and assessment tools and by providing individualized consultation to identify needs and set goals for quality improvement. Funders also have helped and will continue to help Parent Aware work well with and for traditionally underserved communities. Past efforts have included funding to better serve new immigrant communities and to ensure a diverse base of providers in the system.

Replicating Best Practices

There is tremendous interest among Minnesota's private funders, and Minnesota's early childhood community more broadly, in replicating local models that bring communities together to improve outcomes for Children with High Needs. The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative provides a powerful example of this kind of work. Since 2003, the Minnesota Early Childhood

Initiative has supported and grown to include 86 local early childhood coalitions, covering over 200 Greater Minnesota communities, with more than \$12 million in private funding. Based on local needs and priorities, these coalitions have implemented more than 500 evidence-informed projects, programs, and activities on topics related to kindergarten transition, child care quality, and health and wellness, among others. Best practices from these efforts are shared on a website, allowing others to borrow strategies and build on successes.

Other opportunities exist in the replication of larger-scale efforts to coordinate a wide array of programs and services for entire geographic areas. The rural Invest Early Initiative (see Appendix 21), which is currently operating in our Itasca County Target Community, combines Head Start, school-based programming, and child care assistance with public health services, family education, and private resources to fill gaps in programming. This example illustrates the kind of powerful, collective impact individual programs can have when they work together with the private sector toward a shared goal and is the premise of our Target Community efforts. In fact, in each of our Target Communities, there are significant examples of the impact of the private sector.

Many other examples of ELD best practices were shared as part of the Early Learning Challenge planning process through the Early Learning Challenge public input website (see above and A3). Many of those ideas informed and shaped our State Plan; others, while outside the scope of this Plan, have been forwarded to our Children's Cabinet for consideration in broader early childhood planning efforts. This Early Learning Challenge planning process has highlighted the benefits of creating an opportunity for communities across Minnesota to share their best practices and evidence with others facing similar opportunities and challenges in serving Children with High Needs. Program models, approaches to blending and braiding funding, training resources aligned with Parent Aware, funding opportunities, evaluation resources—these are just some examples of resources to be shared in ways that bridge Minnesota's disparate geographies and populations. The Office of Early Learning is already at work creating this virtual learning community, and will work in cooperation with the Centers of Excellence to formalize and publicize it statewide.

Beyond simply sharing learning, another possibility for scaling promising efforts, including the comprehensive place-based models created in the Early Learning Challenge Target Communities, is through public private partnerships. In such an arrangement, the state and the

private sector would agree to align resources in a given geographical area. The private sector would provide technical assistance for large-scale comprehensive planning, collaboration facilitation, and initial investments in collaborative infrastructure; and the state would bring Parent Aware and School Readiness Scholarships to the area. The results of this partnership would be provision of a solid set of tools to the community; an incentive for public and private organizations to continue to work together; and clear demonstration of the potential to accomplish sustainable, systems-changing results.

Pre-K through Third Grade Support

Minnesota's foundation, business, and nonprofit sector is not only committed to ensuring the success of all children entering kindergarten; it is also committed to ensuring a seamless transition into kindergarten and continued success in kindergarten through third grade. United Way organizations throughout the state have historically supported early learning programs, and many are expanding to support efforts to achieve reading at grade level in kindergarten through third grade. In 2008, Greater Twin Cities United Way launched a multi-year investment to include Reading by Third Grade programs, supporting pre-kindergarten through third grade in conjunction with school districts and working in partnership with community based organizations. These partnerships stress best practices in tutoring, parent engagement, and professional development opportunities that align with district strategic plans and curriculum. In the urban core and first ring suburbs, Greater Twin Cities United Way is leveraging more than \$8 million annually to support these efforts.

The evidence-based approach to age-three to grade-three literacy used by the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) is an exciting component of our State Plan in the four Early Learning Challenge Target Communities. As described in D2, they will leverage existing MRC funding to place trained literacy tutors in ELD Programs serving higher numbers of Children with High Needs. Those tutors focus on integrating reading, writing, and talking into all classroom activities. Expert coaches support the MRC's tutors and the Early Childhood Educators already working in the classrooms, and participating Early Childhood Educators can receive AmeriCorps scholarships to further their education in alignment with Minnesota's Career Lattice (D1).

Foundations are also playing a crucial role in this work. In 2011, both the Target Foundation and McKnight Foundation announced comprehensive plans to ensure that all students are reading at grade level. The Target Foundation announced a \$6 million investment in

the Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS) program. This innovative pilot is a literacy instruction model developed by the University of Minnesota and Minnesota Reading Corps, inspired by the Minnesota Reading First School Change in Reading Program (MN Reading First). PRESS intends to accelerate the progress already developed in the district's current balanced literacy program, and focuses on four key components: quality core instruction, data-based decision making, tiered interventions, and professional development.

The McKnight Foundation, in partnership with University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute (UEI), announced a ten-year goal to increase significantly the number of students reading at grade level. This is an expansion of their early learning efforts to support schools and districts in developing comprehensive evaluation and literacy support for all children in pre-kindergarten to third grade. Districts working with McKnight are currently in year one of a planning phase.

Finally, leaders of the Target Foundation, Minneapolis Foundation, Minnesota Business Partnership, and Minnesota Council on Foundations launched the Minnesota Education Philanthropy Research and Analysis (MEPRA) project. The purpose of the project is to better align the efforts of Minnesota's education philanthropy community, including both grant-making foundations and business, to enable organizations to maximize effectiveness. The project's starting point, currently underway, is to inventory what resources are already being provided and to identify potential gaps in funding, as well as opportunities for coordination and collaboration. The project report will be available in December 2011.