

Chair Cheryl Youakim
House Education Finance Committee
RE: HF2497DE1, Voluntary Prekindergarten and Mixed Delivery

March 28, 2023

Dear Chair Youakim and Committee Members,

We the undersigned write regarding the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) portion of HF2497DE1. While we are excited to see this committee propose additional desperately needed investment in early education, we are extremely concerned about the absence of mixed delivery in these expanded services. **The House Education Finance Committee has a strong role to play in early childhood development as well as Minnesota's child care and workforce crisis. The current proposal could actively make the latter worse.** Expanding VPK (currently operating as a public school-only program) is a departure from the work of the Great Start for all Minnesota Children Task Force (Task Force) and a step backwards from meaningful work done on mixed delivery with the Walz Administration over the years.

Mixed Delivery System

"A mixed delivery approach is a system of programming and services for children from birth through age 5 delivered through a variety of providers, settings, and funding structures. These settings include licensed child care centers, licensed family child care providers, family friend and neighbor care, school-based pre-kindergarten, and Head Start programs. Minnesota and other states use a mixed-delivery system in order to offer choices to families that best meet the needs and preferences of families, children, and communities. All types of providers provide benefit and value to the families they serve."ⁱ

Mixed Delivery Commitment

"The Task Force formally acknowledges its **commitment to the Mixed Delivery System**, acknowledging that all types of providers and settings provide value to families and children, and family preference must be honored and respected by design. The Task Force also formally acknowledges that **care and education cannot be separated**: Every single experience a child has is a learning opportunity, making care and education inextricably intertwined. All settings within the mixed delivery system offer safety, supervision, and education to the children they serve. Learning in early childhood is based in play, interactions, and experience, and care and education cannot be separated."ⁱⁱ

Critical Nature of Mixed Delivery

Mixed delivery accomplishes two important things:

- Promoting family choice of setting that meets their needs and cultural preferences
 - VPK in public schools does not work for all families – some would prefer to access VPK in the context of a community based provider (such as family child care, Head Start, or child care centers) for continuity of care (fewer transitions/transportation if families need more programming than the part-day, part-year service provided by VPK), the desire to keep younger siblings together in a single location, cultural practices, etc.
- Preventing the further destabilization of the child care system
 - It is well known that the child care (serving the 0-5 age spectrum) business model relies on prekindergarten-age children (age 4-5) revenue for overall program operations; nearly all infant/toddler programming is delivered at a loss due to necessary lower adult/child ratios; and
 - Research bears out that expansions of school-only prekindergarten programs have unintended negative effects on the quantity and affordability of infant/toddler care. Such research finds that, for example, "These unintended consequences of expanding pre-K primarily in public schools not only hurt private childcare providers, but ultimately harm the families that universal pre-K hopes to serve."ⁱⁱⁱ

Several signatories to this letter served on the Task Force, which was required by statute to, “Identify how to maintain and encourage the further development of Minnesota’s mixed delivery system for early care and education, including licensed family child care, to match family preferences.”^{iv} While VPK statutory language already includes the option for mixed delivery services, in reality mixed delivery in existing VPK is virtually non-existent. Without additional incentives or requirements to continue supporting and developing a mixed delivery system further investment in VPK will yield more of the same.

We applaud your investment in early education and appreciate your attention to this matter. We propose a simple amendment to the current VPK language that would direct a minimum of 50% percent of new VPK slots be contracted to community-based early education settings in order to meet the mixed delivery goals noted above (this method of mixed delivery direction is used in many other states). This simple change would go a long way towards helping ensure access for 0-5 year olds in our current system does not suffer and that family choice is supported.

Sincerely,

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Start Early Funders Coalition



Nancy Jost
West Central Initiative Foundation



Barb Fabre
Indigenous Visioning and All Nations Rise



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Clare Sanford
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Cyndi Cunningham
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David Dominick
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Heather Charmoli
Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children



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Minnesota Prenatal to Three Coalition

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Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood



ⁱ *Final Report: Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force*, published 2-1-2023 and available at https://mn.gov/mmb/assets/Final%20Great%20Start%20for%20All%20MN%20Children%20Task%20Force%20Report%202.1.23_tcm1059-562456.pdf

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Unintended Consequences of Universal Pre-K*, Berkely Public Policy Journal, published 10-17-2017 and available at <https://bppj.berkeley.edu/2017/10/17/unintended-consequences-of-universal-pre-k/>

^{iv} *Final Report: Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force*, published 2-1-2023 and available at https://mn.gov/mmb/assets/Final%20Great%20Start%20for%20All%20MN%20Children%20Task%20Force%20Report%202.1.23_tcm1059-562456.pdf