



April 13, 2021

Representative Rena Moran, Ways and Means Committee Chair
449 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
rep.rena.moran@house.mn

Dear Chair Moran,

We know that the early years are critical in setting a child up for more positive educational, social-emotional, and behavior outcomes. High-quality early childhood education programs can have a profound effect on a child's future, and bring lasting benefits that support our workforce of the future. An investment in early childhood education carries a high return of investment for us all, and it is simply the right thing to do for our youngest Minnesotans. This is why I am writing to support HF 2230, the Early Childhood Omnibus Bill House File.

Ensuring access for all children is central to creating a better and more equitable education system. HF 2230 provides this by ensuring that our tribal Head Start programs receive consistent funding from year-to-year and do not experience a reduction in their share of state funding. This will not only help them to stabilize their operations, but will provide tribal Head Start programs with the potential to increase enrollment opportunities and serve more Indigenous children and families. Head Start improves educational outcomes increasing the likelihood that children graduate from high school, attend college, and receive a post-secondary degree, license, or certification, and has been shown to increase positive parenting practices. Similarly, the addition of alloparent to the Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) statute will ensure that all families have access to programs. Alloparent refers to an individual other than a biological parent that performs the functions that a parent would traditionally perform. While we know that many ECFE programs are already inclusive in this way, I support making program access in statute absolutely clear.

We know that our investments reflect our values. Which is why I am glad HF 2230 includes increased funding for early learning scholarships and an early learning tribal package. By increasing access to high-quality early learning experiences through early learning scholarships, and providing these opportunities more quickly, we will help ensure children are ready for school, particularly children in foster care and children that have experienced homelessness. We will also be able to support American Indian children and their families through funding opportunities for each of Minnesota's 11 Tribal Nations focusing on family engagement, language revitalization, and early learning recruitment and retention of American Indian teachers. Research shows a strong link between student success and effective family engagement that is equitable, inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive. This state support is essential to demonstrating our commitment to our youngest Native learners.

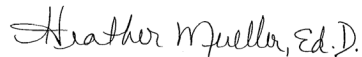
Changes included in HF 2230 will also align early childhood program funding components that create more equitable and conducive learning environments. This small investment can have a significant impact on children

receiving early childhood special education (ECSE) services. By closing the loophole to ensure children receiving ECSE services while also participating in voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) and school readiness plus (SRP) programs receive breakfast like their peers, and ensuring students receiving ECSE services are eligible for English learner revenue and services just as their VPK and SRP peers, we create a more equitable education system. Students with disabilities should have the same access as their peers, and we are happy to see the bill provide that support.

Finally, while it is not specifically included in HF 2230, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the work of the House Education Finance and Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committees to support ongoing funding for VPK seats included in HF 1065. Without their support and without continued funding, 4,000 4-year olds will lose access to high-quality, free prekindergarten next year which would set us back in our work to close the opportunity gap for low-income children. We know that the demand is almost double the amount that is currently funded, so this loss would be devastating for our collective work to close the achievement gap.

Thank you for your consideration of HF 2230. I am grateful to see several of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor's budget and policy proposals related to early childhood education included, along with other important investments, and look forward to a continued partnership on behalf of Minnesota's children and families.

Sincerely,



Heather Mueller, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Education

c: Members of Ways and Means Committee