

Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative

Why Invest In Early Childhood?

All young children need a healthy start in life to grow into strong, productive adults. Accumulating evidence indicates that our country is under-investing in early childhood development, which is diminishing our nation's ability to compete in the global marketplace. Reports released in 2004, such as the Economic Policy Institute's *Exceptional Returns*, Committee for Economic Development's *Ten-Year Plan For The Invest In Kids Working Group*, and the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative's *New Economic Appeal For Preschool*, confirm the huge long-term payoffs from investments in early childhood development programs.

What Is the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative?

In 2003, the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs) began to collaborate on a joint public policy initiative focused on early childhood. Recognizing that strengthening early care and education for young children and their families is the most important investment communities can make for the future, the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative was developed. The overarching goal of the *Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative...A Campaign for Our Youngest Children* is to ensure that every young child has the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving, and succeeding.

What Is Happening?

The MIFs are currently launching 13 new early childhood coalitions, bringing the statewide total to 64. A Statewide Early Childhood Coalition Network has been created to link all the coalitions. This network serves as a vehicle to advance public policy, exchange ideas, share promising practices, and create a statewide groundswell of support for young children.

What Has Been Accomplished to Date?

- **64 Early Childhood Coalitions Launched**

To date, 64 Early Childhood Coalitions have been developed in Greater Minnesota. Within these communities, there are over 2,000 coalition members representing diverse sectors, including the business community.

- **Community Profile Interviews Conducted**

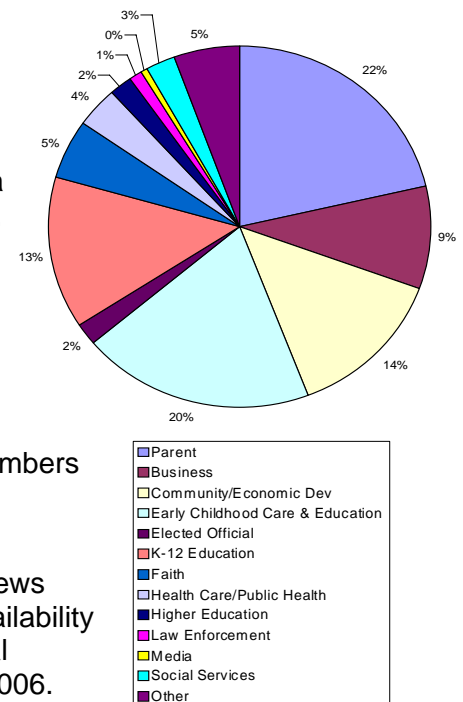
More than 2,000 community members participated in face-to-face interviews from 51 coalitions to share their "perceptions" of the accessibility and availability of resources and support for young children and their families. Additional surveys will be conducted in the 13 newest coalitions during the Fall of 2006.

- **Community-Based Forums - Speak Outs For Early Childhood Held**

To date, 51 coalitions have held forums focused on the realities of early care and education in their communities, engaging over 4,000 community members.

- **Community Visions and Local Action Plans Developed**

To date, 51 coalitions have written Vision Statements and developed local Strategic Action Plans.



What Has Been Learned?

Through interviews, Speak Outs, and community dialogue, several common themes have emerged from the 51 coalitions that were established between September 2003 and January 2006. Common themes include the need to increase: 1) Infant /toddler, extended hour, and respite child care; 2) Infant /toddler mental health services; 3) Financial resources for early care and education programs due to funding cuts; 4) Outreach efforts to families who are not accessing services; 5) Early childhood opportunities due to long waiting lists in existing programs; and 6) Activities to reduce social, cultural, and economic disparities in communities. There is great local enthusiasm across diverse sectors working together to address early care and education issues and opportunities.

Projects, Programs, and Activities Implemented

A few examples of the projects, programs, partnerships, and policy changes that are currently being implemented by the coalitions to strengthen local early care and education are:

- Conduct community literacy programs to increase reading in the homes of families with young children regardless of income;
- Offer a series of comprehensive home visits for new parents/babies;
- Implement a Kindergarten Transition Program in two neighboring school districts;
- Form professional associations for licensed family child care providers to share resources and connect with the local early childhood community;
- Hold meetings with local legislators and community members to increase awareness of early care and education;
- Heighten awareness about early childhood through comprehensive media campaigns;
- Equip a Community Dental Clinic Pediatric Suite serving children on MinnesotaCare and Medical Assistance; and
- Provide every child, regardless of income level, a comprehensive eye exam (rather than just a “screening”) before entering kindergarten.



Contact Information

■ Northwest Minnesota Foundation

Lin Backstrom
Early Childhood Development Specialist
4225 Technology Drive NW
Bemidji, MN 56601
(218) 759-2057 1-800-659-7859
www.nwmf.org

■ Northland Foundation

Lynn Haglin
Vice President/KIDS PLUS Director
202 West Superior Street, Suite 610
Duluth, MN 55802
(218) 723-4040 or 1-800-433-4045
www.northlandfdn.org

■ West Central Initiative

Nancy Jost
Early Childhood Initiative Coordinator
1000 Western Avenue
Fergus Falls, MN 56537
(218) 739-2239 1-800-735-2239
www.wcif.org

■ Initiative Foundation

Linda Kaufmann
Program Manager for Early Childhood & Grants Development
405 First Street SE
Little Falls, MN 56345
(320) 632-9255 1-877-632-9255
www.ifound.org

■ Southwest Initiative Foundation

Sara Carlson
Program Officer
15 3rd Ave. NW, P.O. Box 428
Hutchinson, MN 55350
(320) 587-4848 1-800-594-9480
www.swifoundation.org

■ Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

Anni O’Neill
Community Success Coordinator
25 Florence Avenue, P.O. Box 695
Owatonna, MN 55060
(507) 455-3215 1-800-590-7759
www.smifoundation.org

“Every Young Child Deserves to be Ready for School and Ready for Life”

Minnesota Initiative Foundations

Early Childhood Initiative

