



All kids ready for kindergarten*

What's working

More kids are ready for kindergarten.

- The school district has seen a 10-percent increase in kindergarten readiness. Our goal is 80 percent, and readiness is now up to 66 percent.
- From 2005 to 2008, individual growth scores have gone up, and Way to Grow has a large population of children learning English.
- Parents In Community Action is seeing kids scoring 84 out of 100 on kindergarten benchmark tests, and these are the poorest kids.

There's more awareness about the importance of screening and early childhood education.

- The Minneapolis School District's goal is to screen kids earlier than age 5, and for the first time, we had more 3-year-olds than 5-year-olds at screenings.
- Way to Grow's home visits are up 15 percent to 20 percent.
- Nearly every pre-kindergarten program has a waiting list.
- More parents are engaged in early childhood education.

What isn't working

The lack of nurses is a huge problem.

- Head Start used to have a nurse funded by the City and another nurse paid for by Hennepin County. Those funds are gone, and we can't get funding for a nurse.
- If you're in poverty, well baby care is a luxury. Kids can't go to school when they're sick and they can't succeed when they have unmet health needs. Getting a nurse is our top need.

We aren't meeting the demand for child care.

- There are more than 1,000 kids on the waiting list for Head Start, 500 on the waiting list for Way to Grow and 2,000 on the waiting list for child care assistance.
- The school district would love to have a preschool in every school building but there isn't enough money.
- There are more and more waiting lists for child care — even if your income isn't low.
- It's very expensive to pay for quality child care programs for infants and kids up to age 3.

We aren't screening all children.

- Only about one-third of all preschoolers in Minneapolis are getting screened.

We're enhancing services and working together.

- Hennepin County Library now includes parent training in its free Storytime programs.
- Agencies are finding ways to collaborate and help one another. For example, the Hennepin County Library offered the use of its Readmobile to the Northside's 500 under 5 program.
- The business community is engaged in early childhood education; the Itasca Project and businesses such as Graco, General Mills and Cargill are just a few examples.
- The climate of innovation in Minnesota is very strong.
- We've made strides in mental health for kids. Parents In Community Action's on-site mental health service could become a model for other agencies.

Some data is available and useful.

- The school district's benchmark data helps measure whether children entering kindergarten are on track for third grade. The data are available by zip code, language, ethnicity and school. It's data we can trust.

Families and children face multiple challenges.

- Families need help with food, clothing and housing. We have nowhere to send them.
- The number of homeless kids is increasing. The largest increase in the homeless population is kids from birth to age 3.

We need more involvement, better coordination and sustained resources.

- Business involvement is not commensurate with the need.
- We could be more intentional in coordinating efforts among government, nonprofits and the business sector.
- We start great programs, but then the funding goes away.
- We have aging facilities that need repair, but no one wants to donate money to fix a roof or take care of overdue maintenance.

Early childhood education isn't visible enough.

- Political leaders don't feel they have to "deliver" for little kids. Children are not a special interest group they cater to.

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What isn't working *continued from previous page*

- Political leaders lack knowledge of what needs to be done.
- The level of need for early childhood education isn't on people's radar screens until it hits them personally.

Mental health needs are not being met.

- Mental health issues are the No. 1 reason kids get kicked out of preschool. When you're suspending 500 kindergartners a year, something is wrong.
- Too often, when we identify kids who need mental help, there's no place to send them for help.

North Minneapolis faces phenomenal disparities with other parts of the city.

We don't have enough resources to help students learning English.

Reliable data isn't often available.

- There's no reliable data on social emotional areas.
- Data collected by one agency is hard to use by other agencies. If data is collected to measure one thing but used for something else, we can't be confident about its value for decision-making.
- Too often, data-gathering becomes an excuse not to do anything. People say, "We can't do anything until we get more data." Task forces get formed, but too often nothing gets done.

What should be done next

Get funding for nurses.

- Fund nurses to help ensure that immunizations are up-to-date and health problems are addressed before there's a crisis. Nurses help teachers understand classroom hygiene. Nursing service is essential to the success of early childhood programs.

Instead of starting new initiatives, adequately fund existing programs.

Act broadly.

- Don't think about kids in isolation. Family support is a key component: children can't learn and thrive if their families are heavily stressed.
- Address the social, employment and transit needs in north Minneapolis.
- Develop programs for the working poor and kids who don't speak English.
- Give top priority to the poorest kids.

Increase the visibility of early childhood education and create key messages so leaders understand what needs to be done.

Market the Minneapolis School District to young families.

- The school district should be marketing to young families and establishing relationships with them before those kids enter kindergarten.

Gather and use data intentionally and appropriately.

- Gather data only when we intend to match it with an implementation plan.

***Rename this strategic goal.**

- Rename this goal from "ready-to-read by kindergarten" to something more appropriate such as "ready for kindergarten," "prepared for school" or "school readiness."
Given the compelling arguments made by educators, this strategic direction has been renamed.

"We shouldn't be in the position of telling homeless babies they can't come to preschool. We shouldn't be leaving a preschooler at the Drake all day."

- Childcare advocate