

Early Childhood Initiative FACT SHEET

WHAT IS THE EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE?

The Northland Foundation's KIDS PLUS Program is committed to improving the well-being of children, youth, and families in northeastern Minnesota. The Northland Foundation's Early Childhood Initiative is part of a larger statewide effort in partnership with the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, The McKnight Foundation, and Ready 4 K. This *Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative...A Campaign for Our Youngest Children* is based on the Northland Foundation's KIDS PLUS Coalition-Building model that has been implemented in 26 northeastern Minnesota communities during the past 17 years.

The Early Childhood Initiative's purpose is to ensure that all young children thrive and have a healthy life of learning, achieving, and succeeding. There are four key strategies for this early childhood care and education effort: 1) community coalition-building; 2) public awareness and support; 3) enlistment of the business community; and 4) public policy development and advocacy.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

What happens to the youngest children in our communities, state, and country is more than a family or school issue. It is an issue that affects all of us. Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive – to be given the stimulation and encouragement necessary for healthy development. Research says:

- **The early years are critical.** The infant, toddler, and preschool years are the foundation upon which a healthy childhood and adulthood are built. Current research demonstrates that early experiences have a far-reaching effect on the brain. Millions of connections are made in the brain during a child's very early life. Healthy environments, positive nurturing, and education strengthen these connections and make optimal brain development possible.

- **Child care needs bolstering.** In Minnesota, only about 20 percent of children age five or younger who are in child care enjoy a developmentally positive setting. With appropriate information and resources, parents and caregivers can provide the kind of experiences young children need in order to flourish.

- **Pay now or pay later.** A recent study by the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis revealed that every \$1 invested in early childhood yields a \$9 return and as much as \$12 to \$16 for children at risk by reducing juvenile delinquency, special education, teen pregnancy, welfare dependency, and other negative outcomes later in life. Support for early childhood programs is a wise economic investment.

- **Better preparation for success in school.** Today, nearly one in five Minnesota kindergartners is lacking the language and literacy skills they should have by age five. Only about 50 percent demonstrate the basic social skills needed for succeeding in school. Quality early childhood education and care translate directly into improved school performance.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Since 2003, the Northland Foundation has developed 12 early childhood coalitions in the region. They are: Carlton County, Hermantown/Proctor, Aitkin County, Itasca Area, Koochiching County, Mesabi East School District, Hibbing, the Quad Cities Area, Two Harbors, Silver Bay, Ely and Cook County. The Northland Foundation guides each coalition through a multi-step process to gather information, raise awareness, encourage discussion, create an early childhood vision, and implement strategies that strengthen local resources for young children and their families.

The northeastern Minnesota coalitions are part of the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative, which is directed by the Northland Foundation and the five other Minnesota Initiative Foundations. There are now 80 coalitions in Minnesota that are engaging a diverse group of local citizens to ensure our state's youngest children get the best possible start. The success of these community-based efforts relies on the assistance of parents, teachers, caregivers, business people, legislators...the list goes on.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Lynn Haglin
Vice President/KIDS PLUS Director
Northland Foundation
610 Sellwood Bldg., 202 W. Superior St.
Duluth, MN 55802
218-723-4040 or 1-800-433-4045
E-mail: info@northlandfdn.org
Web site: www.northlandfdn.org