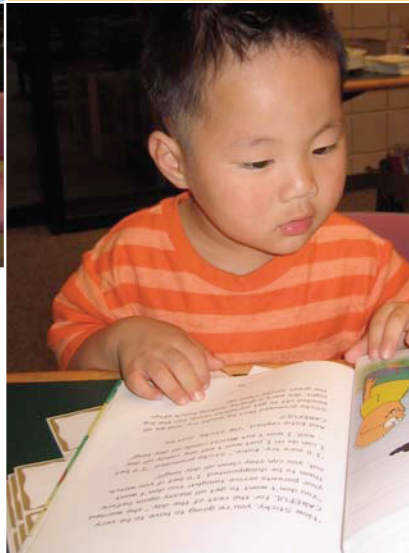




Minnesota Early Learning Foundation

Annual Report • April 2007



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Minnesota Early Learning Foundation

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Annual Letter from Board Chair & Executive Director

April 2007

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation has made important steps in its first year. From compiling and organizing the knowledge about what works to prepare children from low income families for school, to identifying the gaps in what we know and what is actually being done, to establishing working relationships with key partners, to raising funds to initiate the demonstration projects, scholarship model and a quality rating system; MELF has had a productive year that lays the groundwork for a systems look at early childhood services in Minnesota. Our mission is to recommend cost-effective strategies for preparing low- income children to succeed in kindergarten. This report will update and inform on the tremendous progress the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation has made through March 2007.

Sincerely,

Warren Staley
CEO, Cargill Inc.
Board Chair, MELF

Duane Benson
Executive Director, MELF

Background

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) was established as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization in 2005. MELF was created through a partnership of leaders from the foundation, corporate and civic sectors to address growing concerns about the lack of school readiness among many children entering kindergarten, and the significant impact this was having now, and would have in the future, on Minnesota's economy and quality of life.



This lack of school readiness results from gaps in the system for serving young children:

Information gaps

- Parents lack information to select quality early care and education programs
- Early childhood program staff lack information about how to increase quality
- Policy makers and funders lack information to guide funding decisions

Quality gaps

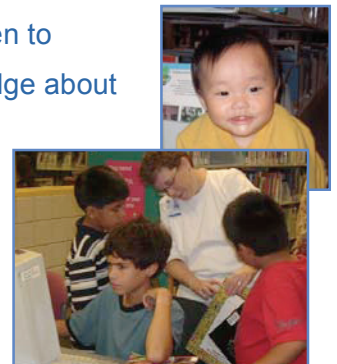
- Existing early childhood programs are of uneven quality
- Quality of implementation of existing or proven models varies greatly
- The programs within the state's early childhood system are rarely evaluated against the goal of getting children ready for school success
- Early childhood programs lack resources, or resources may need to be redirected, to increase program quality

Access gaps

- Some communities do not have enough early childhood programs to meet families' needs
- High quality early childhood programs are often not affordable for low-income families
- Some early childhood programs do not provide the comprehensive and intensive services that families need, nor are families always able to patch together those services

Mission and Goals

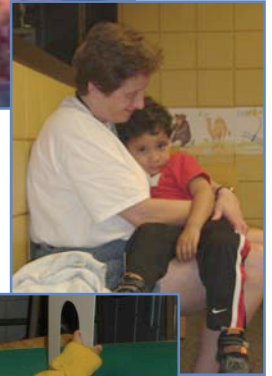
MELF's mission is to recommend cost-effective strategies for preparing children to succeed in school. We will pursue this mission by compiling a body of knowledge about what works best and most cost-effectively in promoting learning readiness among children of low-income families and families facing other challenges. This includes collecting information on appropriate actions needed across the system and for specific groups with the highest need, weighing the effectiveness of various program models, supporting engagement by and empowerment of parents, and determining the key short and longer-term outcomes and indicators that are valid, direct measures of children's experiences.



MELF's approach is to take a "systems look" at the early childhood learning and education field in Minnesota. By moving away from a focus on categorical interventions and towards a combination of demonstration grants, research, evaluation, and family scholarships, MELF will develop a better understanding of how the parts of the system interact.

The specific goals are to:

1. Identify effective (evidence-based) models for key components of the system— parent education and early care and education programs
2. Optimize opportunities for families to choose the right kind of services to meet their needs, through evidence-based child assessment systems and well-validated quality rating systems of childcare and other early learning programs
3. Determine how best to support professional development for providers of early care and education, and how quality in implementation can be assured through monitoring and policy
4. Identify an optimally cost-effective set of services for promoting early learning to meet the diverse developmental needs and dosage-requirements for children from low-income families and children facing other challenges
5. Develop a picture of how funding, services, and policy best work together to form an integrated system where children do not fall through the cracks
6. Develop ways to gauge how programs contribute to school readiness through measures that are based on real experiences of children.



MELF is in a unique position as an "honest broker" to address these issues. MELF is not a service-provider, nor an advocacy agency. MELF does not have a vested interest in any particular type of strategy, but is instead collecting and compiling information about what exists, what works best, what is needed and how to create a cost-effective early childhood system. Although MELF is making grants, it is not duplicating the services provided by other funders focusing on these types of services. Rather, MELF focuses on funding specific types of demonstration projects linked with strong evaluation efforts to yield better understanding of best practices and cost-effectiveness. At the end of a five year period (2007 – 2011), MELF intends to utilize the information it has compiled to issue a set of recommendations about how to craft a well-integrated, cost-effective system to best prepare children for kindergarten.

While MELF focuses on improving the school readiness of at-risk children, research and experience both clearly indicate that the well-being of children is also linked to many factors beyond simply the quality of the early childhood services they receive. To be fully ready for success in school and in life, children need support for *all* aspects of their development. They need loving families; financial resources; affordable health care; healthy food; safe, stable places to live; and access to quality educational experiences throughout their childhood. MELF dedicates resources to exploring what early childhood care and educational programs work best, and most cost-effectively, for children, while acknowledging that such programs are only one part of the foundation of support that all children need and deserve.

MELF Initiatives Underway in 2006

To achieve its mission, MELF is supporting and sponsoring evaluations of a number of initiatives focused on improving school readiness. All of these initiatives were launched in 2006.

Quality Rating System: Develop and pilot a Quality Rating System (QRS) to empower parents with information about the quality of existing early childhood programs, and to support efforts to increase program quality.

Early Childhood Development Scholarships: Pilot the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Scholarship program model proposed by Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. The program will use mentors to provide low-income parents with information about child development and selecting a quality early childhood program, as well as scholarships to allow children to attend such high-quality programs.

Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects: Provide financial and logistical support for four key site-based initiatives (North Minneapolis, St. Paul City-Wide, Wayzata in Western Hennepin County, and Nicollet/Blue Earth Counties) with high levels of identified need. MELF will explore the relative effectiveness of specific approaches and whether building a stronger array of services in a community results in improved school readiness, including: parent engagement, increased access, quality and stability of early childhood programs. These projects share the following approaches—they foster the development of strategic and practical partnerships in those geographic areas, pilot the implementation of the Quality Rating System, pilot the Early Childhood Development Scholarships in one location, identify and fill gaps so that a system of quality programs is in place, and work to involve high levels of commitment and coordination of public/private entities.

Innovation Projects: Make innovation grants to selected community organizations providing early childhood services, as well as organizations seeking to build and support the “infrastructure” for increasing quality across early childhood programs. These innovation grants are targeted to programs using promising strategies that have not yet been well-researched and/or programs that meet needs of an underserved population or geographic area for which the program’s strategy has not yet been well-researched. Grantees will be rigorously evaluated to ensure MELF-funded activities contribute to the body of knowledge about program effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.



Each of these initiatives and corresponding pilot projects is described in the document entitled *Catalog of MELF Initiatives 2006*.

Research and Evaluation

A strong evaluation of each of the funded initiatives will increase our shared understanding of the impact of each strategy on improving school readiness, and the cost-effectiveness of those individual strategies. In addition to understanding what program models are effective, MELF seeks knowledge to strengthen the overall early childhood system. Accomplishing this requires a clearer picture of the necessary pieces of that system, the gaps, and how the pieces must be fit together to be sure that current and future investment of resources in that system yield the highest returns in school readiness.

While there is a large and growing body of research on effective practices for promoting school readiness, and a related body of work on the long-term consequences of school readiness interventions, the nature of that research is not well-suited to the type of system-wide review and improvement being done by MELF. To leverage existing research knowledge (as well as best-practices recommendations), University of Minnesota researchers and evaluators, spearheaded by the Center for Early Education and Development, are working with MELF to compile and organize the body of knowledge about what will work to promote school readiness for Minnesota's low-income children, to describe how MELF's initiatives build on this knowledge, to identify gaps between what we know and what is being done, and pull the threads of policy, funding, and program development together to best support a cost-effective system for promoting school readiness among at-risk children.

The MELF evaluation plan includes:

- Description of the current knowledge, from research and best practices, for promoting school readiness (i.e., a taxonomy of effective ECD practices and reviews of literature in selected areas)
- Development of a comprehensive, cross-age model for assessing children's progress toward school readiness (i.e., a measurement model)
- Technical assistance to MELF innovation grantees to implement research-based evaluation of program services and outcomes
- Coordinating the evaluation of MELF's innovation grants, quality rating system, and ECD Scholarship program to describe their unique and combined contributions to school readiness

As described above, MELF is working with the University of Minnesota to pull together key research findings to create a taxonomy, or evidence-based map of the components of an early childhood system that is effective in improving the school readiness outcomes for young children. The taxonomy is a key because it is the foundation that guides the decisions around funding and evaluation. This contributes to MELF's goal of filling in some of the gaps in that map by targeting resources to innovative initiatives and evaluating their results. The taxonomy provides both map and milestones by which MELF can be held accountable.

Taking a systems-look at the early childhood learning system is based on recognizing that increased learning readiness for children facing significant challenges requires complex, comprehensive strategies interacting synergistically with available resources, partners, and community dynamics. No single intervention or model will suffice, nor will a one-size-fits-all community solution work. Rather, we seek to identify the most important qualities and processes of an effective and supportive system, including a range of strategies that have been proven effective in key areas, and ways to optimize both outcomes and cost-effectiveness.

Initial Learnings and Recommendations

Policy makers and funders will have many opportunities to impact the early childhood system in Minnesota prior to MELF's final recommendations in five years. MELF's evaluation team is reviewing the research and evaluation literature on early childhood programming, and has also convened groups of key stakeholders who are invested in the outcomes of this process. One of MELF's goals is to provide information so policy and funding decisions are informed by the existing body of knowledge. Although we are in the beginning stages of this work, several dimensions quickly emerged in a clear and compelling way, and suggest a focus for policy and funding decisions:

Focus on the outcome--school readiness: This is the most important outcome of any early childhood program and must be the cornerstone of determining its effectiveness. A focus on outcomes also changes the way we look at the problem by allowing creative problem solving, the use of innovative but evidence-based strategies or a combination of strategies that match the situation. We don't cleave to any one silo—be it program, approach, or school of thought, but always keep an eye to whether the means cost-effectively contributes to the desired outcome of school readiness.

MELF needs to support the development of measures of quality and success that are based on real experiences of children rather than the standardized proxies that lack predictive validity and may mask variations in quality of implementation. A scientifically valid and practically relevant set of metrics will help to understand how programs contribute to success, and provide a yardstick against which to measure progress. To be most meaningful, these measures need to be multi-faceted, policy-relevant, and locally collected.

Invest where most needed: on children most at risk: Poverty and low-quality early care have been linked to poor school performance and the problems of grade retention and drop-outs. Programs that focus intensive services early in the lives of children whose life circumstances put them at-risk of not being prepared for school success have been shown to improve school performance and the lives of parents and children. It is difficult to create universal programs with the necessary level of intensity, risking that low-income kids can fall through the cracks. Only those programs which seek to provide at-risk families and children with individualized and relationship-based services can effectively narrow the achievement gap.

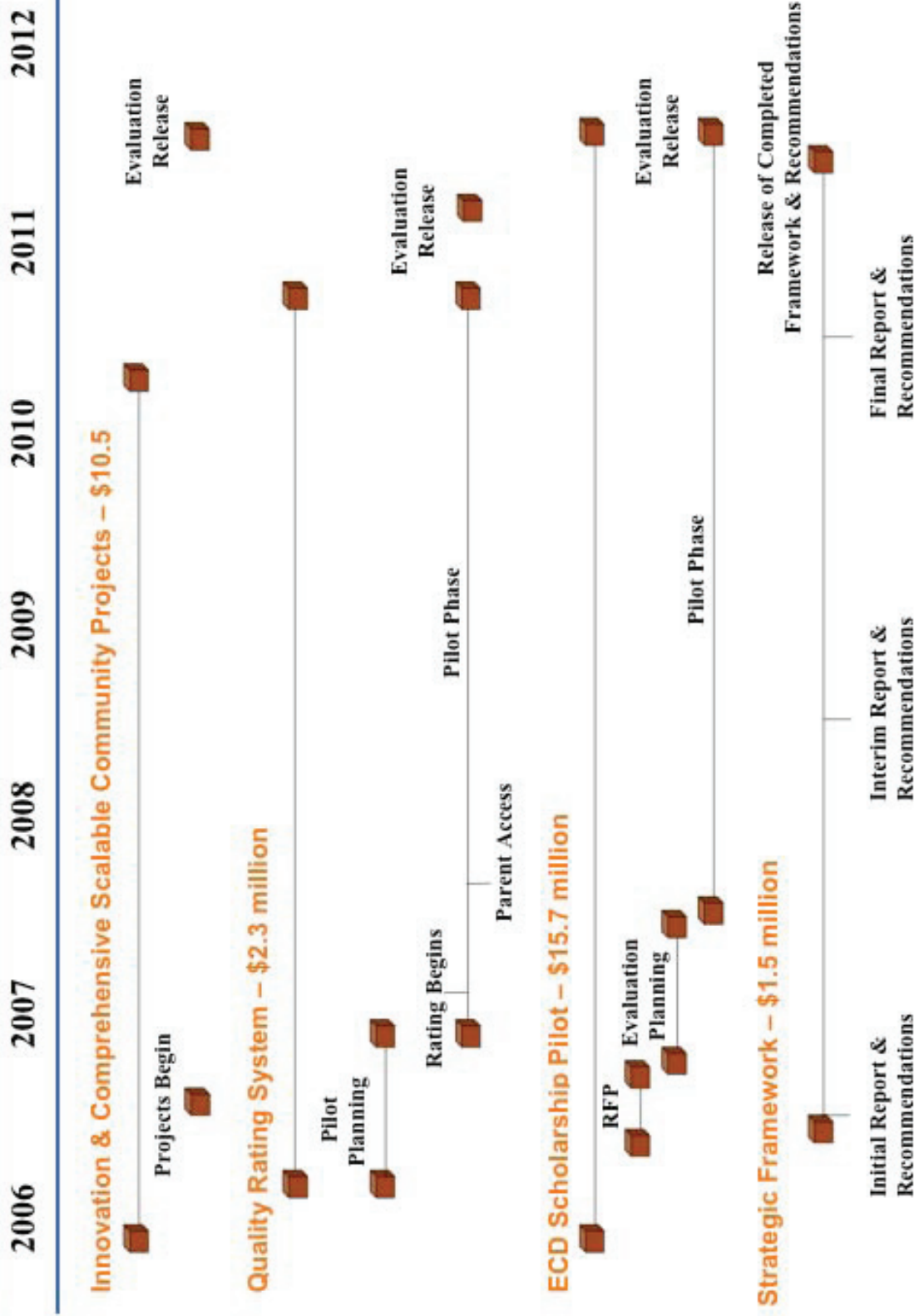
Empower parents: Parents are their children's first teachers and should be empowered by access to information to make the decisions necessary for the development of their children, and the resources to access these services. Early childhood development programs that tailor their services to meet the needs of parents and children have shown to be effective in engaging parents and producing strong outcomes for children.

Optimize cost-effectiveness: Funding of early childhood development is an investment, and the outcomes of programs need to be measured against the inputs.

These recommendations begin to convey the values and features of a system which not only aims at school readiness, but measures itself by its success in this area; ensures the buy-in of key stakeholders at all levels; and focuses efforts where most needed at sufficient levels. A successful systems-approach is neither neat nor clean, but rather, is both robust and nimble enough to shift and evolve as new obstacles or new opportunities emerge.

Both in the short- and long-term, MELF encourages all policy makers and funders to support those programs that are established, backed by research, and have demonstrated success. By promoting early childhood development for children from low-income families, policy makers and funders can make an investment in the future of this state that will pay off for generations.

MELF Program Timeline



1. Quality Rating System

Description: The Quality Rating System (QRS) is a tool to provide parents with information about the quality of existing early childhood programs, and to support programs to increase quality. The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network will implement the pilot for the Quality Rating System, in partnership with and receiving guidance from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Both will work with MELF and other key stakeholders on program development and implementation of the QRS in several pilot sites around the state. The grant will also provide supports and incentives for providers to increase the quality of the services they provide to children and to facilitate their participation in the Quality Rating System. This work will enhance the Network's existing capacity to provide technical assistance and support for child care program quality improvement and leverage existing resources available for enhancing program quality in child care settings. Child Trends will conduct the evaluation of the project.

Why needed: Minnesota's current system for supporting early learning through programs and funding is a patchwork quilt of public and private efforts with variable levels of quality, many gaps, and little integration of services. There is little information available about program quality or whether programs successfully prepare children for kindergarten. For families seeking quality care and programming, it is extremely difficult to navigate the system to find the best set of options for their children's needs, and even more difficult to access affordable services. Parents would benefit through access to information to help them understand the characteristics of high quality early learning programs and choose the options that best meet their children's needs.

Priorities Addressed: The QRS meets the MELF goal of empowering parents by providing families with the information they need to choose appropriate, effective early care and education services to meet their needs. The QRS pilot is designed to address previously raised concerns about measuring child outcomes, utilizing indicators with strong research base when possible, and focusing on parents as the consumer of the information.

Unique/Innovative Qualities: The QRS being piloted is the only one in the nation with a goal of school readiness and a domain that specifically addresses learning readiness progress. It is also the only statewide QRS that considers whether families actually use the system to find quality settings for their children. We are creating an advisory board of parents to assist with this project and will work with them and marketing business partnerships to determine how best to deliver information to families.

Key Partners

- Child Trends
- Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R)
- Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Amherst Wilder Foundation

Pilot Sites

- City-Wide Early Learning Initiative – St. Paul
- Two neighborhoods in North Minneapolis
- Caring for Kids Initiative – Wayzata
- Blue Earth/Nicollet Counties

2. Early Childhood Development (ECD) Scholarship

Description: This will be a pilot of the scholarship model envisioned by Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, and will help provide family mentors and scholarships to low-income parents to enable them to choose a variety of quality services. MELF will set the quality standards required for programs to qualify to receive children with scholarships. These standards will align with the Quality Rating System. The ECD Scholarship Program pilot will occur in neighborhoods with a relatively high proportion of low-income families. Parents from low-income families lack funds to send children to a high quality ECD program. Because the benefits of attending a high

quality ECD program accrue not only to children and their parents but to society as a whole, scholarships for low-income children more accurately reflect the societal demand for these services. This fund has the goal of providing parent mentoring and scholarships for approximately 1400 low-income children ages prenatal to age 5 by 2011.

Why Needed: An emerging body of research shows that key aspects of brain development occur during the first years of life. Lack of high quality care giving and developmental supports during this period can directly affect children's development and school readiness. Right now, up to 50% of children in Minnesota are not fully ready for kindergarten. Children from low-income homes are more likely than any other group to show up for kindergarten unprepared. For these children, this is the beginning of an achievement gap that, if not addressed may widen and become more costly and difficult to close as the child gets older. High quality early education can help close the achievement gap and prepare children for kindergarten, but these programs can be expensive making them inaccessible to low-income families. And while Head Start and some other individual program offer support, only approximately 60% of low-income children are currently served. The ECD Scholarship Fund will provide low-income families with scholarships and assistance to send their children to high quality programming, and maintain the level of needed services until learning readiness is achieved.

Priorities Addressed: The Scholarship for Early Childhood Development further empowers families, and addresses the issue of gaps of access to quality programs, and the difficulties for many families in providing stable, consistent care. The ECD Scholarship Program also focuses resources on serving children, prenatal to five, most at risk of entering kindergarten unprepared.

Unique/Innovative Qualities: This will be the first intensive piloting and evaluation of the Rolnick model.

Key Partners

- Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
- City of St Paul
- ECD Scholarship Program Advisory Group
- Evaluator (to be named after selection from national search)

Pilot Site:

- City-Wide Early Learning Initiative – St. Paul

3. Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects

Description: Provide financial and logistical support for four key site-based initiatives (North Minneapolis, St. Paul City-wide, Wayzata in Western Hennepin County, and Nicollet/Blue Earth Counties) with high levels of identified need. MELF will explore the relative effectiveness of specific approaches and whether building a stronger array of services in a community results in better outcomes, including: parent engagement; availability, quality and stability of early childhood programs; and the primary outcome of children entering kindergarten ready for school success. These projects share the following approaches—they foster the development of strategic and practical partnerships in those geographic areas, pilot the implementation of the Quality Rating System, and in some sites the Early Childhood Development Scholarship Fund, identify and fill gaps so that a system of quality programs are in place, and work to involve high levels of commitment and coordination of public/private entities.

MELF, along with other partners, will provide resources for an intensive effort to address these goals.

Implementation strategies may include:

- mapping the geographic area to identify where children, parents and services exist;
- providing home visiting/mentoring and other strategies to reach and assist hard-to-engage parents;
- infusing quality enhancements into both formal and informal child care settings, including implementation of a Quality Rating System;
- creating linkages between family/friend/neighbor care and high-quality education settings/opportunities;

- providing scholarships for children in early childhood education settings when stable resources do not exist that enable families to provide for continuous and high-quality care (program and family scholarship models will be tested).

These projects will also serve as the pilot sites for a Quality Rating System.

Why Needed: The four scalable site projects that are each implementing several elements of the emerging comprehensive system are needed to assess how the parts of the system work together, by addressing the supply issues of optimizing available quality program slots, the demand issues of supporting families to choose quality programs and ensuring their ability to access those programs, and the evaluation issues of measuring success in program and child outcomes. The evaluation will provide formative information about the challenges of implementing and coordinating such a system, about how implementation can be adapted to different contingencies across these diverse sites, in addition to providing summary findings that document the cumulative impacts on learning readiness.

Priorities Addressed: The Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects meet most of the MELF goals, but in particular, address the goals of understanding how “system-level” strategies will work together. We have identified four primary system-level goals for our work in these project areas:

1. Retain and expand high-quality early childhood settings
2. Demonstrate program effectiveness and child progress in preparing children for kindergarten
3. Engage parents early and often in their child’s school readiness
4. Stabilize children in high-quality early childhood settings

Pilot Sites & Key Partnerships

Pilot Site #1: Two neighborhoods in North Minneapolis

This North Minneapolis project is focused on two neighborhoods of North Minneapolis, and will track 500 children under age 5 to school readiness level. The three primary goals of this program are: engaging parents in their child’s school readiness; promoting high-quality early childhood settings; and stabilizing children in high-quality early childhood settings. Many have provided resources to programs that will be tapped in carrying out this project including Blue Cross Blue Shield, Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis School Readiness Collaborative, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, Folwell Center for Urban Initiatives, CEED and Mayor R.T. Rybak.

Pilot Site #2: City-Wide St. Paul Project

The St. Paul project represents a citywide Early Childhood Initiative led by Mayor Chris Coleman. A major effort in St. Paul will be the implementation of the Quality Rating System, and a pilot of the Rolnick Scholarship model in two neighborhoods. This project will also include a grant to the St. Paul Schools to target care providers for training to improve the school readiness of children in licensed child care settings. The cooperation of the City allows a test of integration of city and community based systems in improving services and the opportunity to leverage additional resources.

Pilot Site #3: Wayzata, a suburb of Hennepin County

MELF is working with the Interfaith Outreach and Community Partnership’s Caring for Kids Initiative (CKI) and the Wayzata School District #284, to pilot the QRS in suburban Hennepin County. The Caring for Kids Initiative will collaborate with care centers, social service providers and others to target low- income or challenged families and provide them with information and scholarships to Kids Care Connection and several other high quality care centers in the area. CKI would also provide social services support, parent education, and when appropriate, facilitate interventions.

Pilot Sites #4: Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties – This project is a partnership with the Taylor Corporation and is in the beginning stages of development. With a planning grant from Taylor and MELF, the Child Care Resource & Referral Network will gather baseline data to plan for implementation of quality rating system as a parent tool and accountability measure for quality early care and education in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties.

4. Innovation Projects

Description: These are individual projects funded to address a specific need or learning issue identified by the taxonomy, or to help develop cost-effective strategies to address specific challenges.

Priorities Addressed: To meet one of the goals/criteria for funding:

Identify effective (evidence-based) models for key component of the system— childcare, parent education, and home visiting programs

1. Identify effective (evidence-based) models for key component of the system— childcare, parent education, and early care and education programs
2. Optimize opportunities for families to choose the right kind of services to meet their needs through evidence-based child assessment systems, well-validated quality rating systems of childcare and other early learning programs.
3. Determine how best to support professional development for providers during the early learning years, and how quality in implementation can be assured through monitoring and policy.
4. Identify an optimally cost-effective set of services for promoting early learning to meet the diverse developmental needs and dosage-requirements of children from low-income families and children facing other challenges.
5. Develop ways to gauge how programs contribute to school readiness through measures that are based on real experiences of children.

Description of 12 Innovation Projects

1. Accreditation Project

Description: This project will deliver accreditation facilitation services aimed at helping child care programs reach as many of the accreditation standards as possible, with the ultimate goal of documented program quality improvements aligned with accreditation standards. The project will target primarily child care programs that serve a minimum of 25% at-risk children and are located in geographic locations included in the quality rating system pilot. MELF is partnering with the Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Accreditation Task Force (MATF) to help child care providers pursue accreditation. Grant funds will be used to provide supports for quality improvements necessary for accreditation and to partially reimburse the costs of accredited fees for center and family child care providers. The grant will also offer incentives to targeted programs to encourage participation, include regular reports on the progress of individual programs toward accreditation and collect data on child outcomes of the programs obtaining these services.

Priorities Addressed: Improving provider quality and creating a stronger program development infrastructure

2. Autism Society of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Description: This project will provide intensive early intervention to children ages 0-5 years with autism from low income or challenged families, who have been identified for traditional special education through the Minneapolis Public Schools. Most of the families lack the financial and personal resources to find and purchase community resources outside of the public school services, to achieve the level of intensive intervention promoted by research. This project will train parents as interventionists to help their children by intensively engaging them and helping them to progress through a series of functional developmental levels to address language and socialization deficits.

Priorities Addressed: This project helps assess a model of service for families with identified with a child with autism, provides early identification and comprehensive assessment and services for low-income families.

3. Bloomington Public Schools, Bloomington

Description: The goal of this project is to compare the gains in school readiness skills that children from low-income or challenged families make in three different models of high quality preschools differing in the amount of time children spend in programming. It will also be looking at which models yield outcomes that are significant enough to prepare children with the skills they need to close the achievement gap.

Priorities Addressed: This project evaluates three different models offering different program dosages.

4. Joyce Preschool, Minneapolis

Description: Joyce Preschool has been serving low-income and other at-risk children for 40 years including new immigrant bilingual immersion language programs and family literacy and education programs. Joyce Preschool has developed a successful bilingual language program that helps Latino/Hispanic children prepare for kindergarten. The purpose of this grant is to expand the capacity of program to engage in model sharing and technical assistance so the program can be replicated in other preschools with large Latino/Hispanic populations. To achieve this goal Joyce will: expand its family support and literacy programs including its *Padres de Familias* pilot program, document and evaluate its two-way immersion model to serve as an incubator for similar programs, and develop a network of child care professionals to promote dual-immersion education of ELL children.

Priorities Addressed: Expand capacity of Spanish family support & learning programs and develop training for other programs to implement the dual-immersion model.

5. Minnesota Head Start Child Outcomes Project, Statewide

Description: Minnesota Head Start programs are federally required to collect research-based assessment data on children in Head Start programs. The data informs a large range of local decision-making around professional development, classroom and program improvement, and parent education; however, the data collection methods vary across programs and are not centrally collected and aggregated. This grant would support the aggregation of Head Start data in three ways:

- Offer continuing education to teachers/administrators on how to collect and interpret assessment information
- Provide incentives to Head Start programs to purchase comparable assessment tools
- Inform methodology on how to use child outcome data for policy decision-making and program evaluation

Priorities Addressed: MN Head Start Programs have been compiling a rich data set through their services—assessing at-risk children at three points in time across three years, documenting services and improvements in outcomes. This project will develop a comparative evaluation tool to assess overall performance of children in Head Start.

6. Parent Education Models: Anoka-Hennepin, St. Paul and Waseca

Description: The purpose of this project is to increase kindergarten readiness for children living in low-income and/or challenged families by creating a diverse delivery system of parent education approaches to serve hard-to-reach families. This project is designed to engage challenged families by providing a variety of service models (Parents As Teachers, MELD, Early Childhood Family Education) and customized combinations of the models to meet individual family needs. This pilot will run for 3 years at ECFE locations in Saint Paul, Waseca and the Anoka-Hennepin school districts. It is hoped that by providing a stronger continuum of services to families, they will be better able to navigate the system resulting in an increase in school readiness and the engagement and strength of families.

Priorities Addressed: The project will test the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of combining service models for hard-to-serve families

7. Saint Paul Public Schools (SPSS), St. Paul

Description: This grant will provide for the establishment of a program that will link SPSS with licensed child care providers in the St. Paul area and provide them with training and curriculums designed to improve the school readiness for children, from low income or challenged families, in their programs. The providers will be trained and given curriculum that has direct connections to what the children will be learning in kindergarten. This program will also enhance parent education opportunities and attempt to provide a smoother transition for children entering school. Evaluations will be carried out on all levels of implementation and include surveys and scored assessments of children in the program.

Priorities Addressed: Train licensed child care providers to prepare children to be ready for school.

8. Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative, Roseville

Description: This project will improve literacy skills for families in suburban Ramsey communities served by the Roseville, White Bear Lake, Mounds View and Maplewood/North St. Paul school districts. With the support of a challenge grant and activities of the Roseville Rotary, this project is receiving MELF matching funding to develop a program to work within Roseville School District to reach out to the increasing population of language and culturally isolated families and other isolated families in the community to ensure that their children reach kindergarten with the skills necessary to be successful learners. This project will create systems to identify pre-school children who have not had a formal preschool experience, locate services in places where families congregate and create opportunities for connections between the business community and newer members of our community to help support their literacy. This project will be also be implemented in White Bear Lake, Mounds View and Maplewood/North St. Paul school districts with the assistance of local service organizations in these communities.

Priorities Addressed: This project involves a partnership with civic organizations that will increase integration of immigrant families into the early learning system, schools and community. Evaluations will be carried out on the children and will measure their progress over the course of their education.

9. Wilder Foundation, St. Paul

Description: The purpose of this grant is to examine the level of participation in Family Literacy programs needed for children from low- income or at- risk families to be ready for kindergarten. This project will determine the intensity of the literacy program needed and include analysis of the cost-effectiveness of the program. Assessments of children will be carried out each fall and as the children enter kindergarten.

Priorities Addressed: Examination of proper program dosage

Innovation Projects Under Development

10. Anoka County Community Action, Anoka

Description: Healthy Families—focused on connecting children of families 0-3 with services, home visiting programs.

Priorities Addressed: still being negotiated

11. Rochester Area Foundation's First Steps, Rochester

Description: Identify a child progress indicator for the QRS.

Priorities Addressed: still being negotiated

12. TwinWest Chamber of Commerce

Description: Explore providing parent education and other family support services for employees of a manufacturing company.

Priorities Addressed: still being negotiated

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation Donor List March 2005- March 2007

Corporate and Foundation Contributors:

Cargill Foundation/ Cargill Inc.	The Opus Foundation
General Mills Foundation	Taylor Corporation
The McKnight Foundation	Roseville Rotary
Best Buy Company, Inc	Mulcahy, Inc.
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Individual Donors:

Duane and Melissa Benson	Richard Todd and Patricia Haswell
Nicole Cermak	Andrea Walsh
Robbin Johnson	Barbara Yates
Arthur Rolnick	

In Honor of...

Albert Stroucken – *by HB Fuller*
Art Rolnick – *by Perbix Machine Company*
Warren Staley – *by Thrivent Financial*

On Behalf Of...

The Cornwall Family - *by Mark Taylor & Jane Mercier*
Madge Alberts – *by Cathy Jordan*
Candice Bartelle – *by Cathy Jordan*
Sara Benning – *by Cathy Jordan*
Michael Brott – *by Cathy Jordan*
Ellen Lepinsky – *by Cathy Jordan*
Nick Leonard – *by Cathy Jordan*
Cari Michaels – *by Cathy Jordan*

Leveraged Resources

In addition to direct grants that have been made to the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation, we have leveraged \$3 million from other organizations and units of government for MELF activities.

Emerging Partnerships

Several Minnesota based foundations have a significant history of giving to support early childhood activities. These organizations have expressed interest in our activities, research and evaluation and our mission. We are exploring ways to create partnerships to work together to address issues of mutual concern. While these partnerships are in various stages of conversation and development, we anticipate joining forces with these funders to fund specific activities, primarily in our comprehensive scalable community sites. In total, we expect resources from these entities to represent multi-year, multi-million dollar investments.

2007 Financial Statements

Minnesota Early Learning Foundation Statement of Financial Position as of March 31, 2007

ASSETS	Mar 31, 2007
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
Eagle Crest Capital	2,062,209.30
Total Checking/Savings	2,062,209.30
Accounts Receivable	
Accounts receivable	4,900,000.00
Total Accounts Receivable	4,900,000.00
Total Current Assets	6,962,209.30
Fixed Assets	
Accum deprec- furn,fix,equip	-938.00
Furniture, fixtures, & equip	8,068.33
Total Fixed Assets	7,130.33
TOTAL ASSETS	6,969,339.63
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Credit Cards	
Advanta-	13.57
Total Credit Cards	13.57
Other Current Liabilities	
Accrued payroll taxes	2,995.61
Total Other Current Liabilities	2,995.61
Total Current Liabilities	3,009.18
Total Liabilities	3,009.18
Equity	
Unrestrict (retained earnings)	1,664,586.93
Net Income	5,301,743.52
Total Equity	6,966,330.45
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	6,969,339.63

Statement of Support, Revenues and Expenses

July 1, 2005- March 31, 2007

SUPPORT AND REVENUES	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL	TOTAL LESS STARTUP*
Contributed Support	\$2,005,000	\$ 428,261	\$5,633,558	\$8,066,819	\$8,066,819
Earned Revenues	3,618	92,643	12,786	109,047	109,047
Total Support and Revenues	2,008,618	520,904	5,646,344	8,175,865	\$8,175,865
EXPENSES					
Program Costs	-	563,483	304,866	868,348	\$868,348
Administrative	117,244	62,242	17,534	197,020	\$79,776
Fund Raising Costs	-	121,816	22,200	144,016	\$113,929
Total Expenses	117,244	747,541	344,600	1,209,385	\$1,062,054
Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	1,891,374	(226,637)	5,301,744	6,966,480	\$7,113,811
Unrestricted Net Assets					
Beginning	-	1,891,374	1,664,737	-	
Ending	\$1,891,374	\$1,664,737	\$6,966,480	\$6,966,480	\$7,113,811
Program %		75.38%	88.47%	71.80%	81.76%
Administrative %		8.33%	5.09%	16.29%	7.51%
Fundraising %		16.30%	6.44%	11.91%	10.73%

* Start up costs consisting of 2005 expenses plus \$30,087 of a fundraising study incurred in 2006 are omitted