

Response to Ready4K's Q & A Misinformation  
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Ready4K posted a Q and A response to concerns posted by EdAction regarding the breathtaking expansion of state interference in the raising of young children up for consideration in the Legislature this session. Their document is replete with misstatements and half-truths that require a response.

1) Q: Would these pieces of legislation "form a massive financial and structural expansion of state authority over our youngest children?"

**Ready4K Myth:**

"No. This legislation is a very modest public investment in early childhood care and education...Ready4K's efforts begin to build a framework for a more effective, coordinated early care and education system that provides accountability for results. It provides information for parents and providers about school readiness....It builds a broader base of both public and private resources for supporting parents in helping prepare their children for school...."

**EdAction Facts-**

**\$185 million of new spending, as stated on the Ready4K website (<http://action4kids.org/takeaction.asp?aaid=1089&org=17>), is not a "modest investment" in this time of huge budget deficits. Todd Otis gushed in his Senate testimony "Wow! This is the first major ray of hope since Arne Carlson was Governor." Ready4K assumes a) that parents are not capable of raising their children without government and "expert" advice from them; b) that because a small minority of disadvantaged children need help, they must impose government standards and tests on all children in the state of Minnesota; c) that is the government's role to step in and begin education even before children enter school in order to promote kindergarten "readiness" and d) that the private sector cannot be involved in helping the small minority of children that do need help without government oversight and involvement. None of these assumptions are true.**

**Parents have done a fine job raising their children. There is no readiness crisis. According to the largest national longitudinal study of 22,000 children performed by the US Department of Education - 94% are proficient at recognizing numbers, shapes, and counting to ten, 92% are eager to learn, 97% are in good health, 82% have basic pre-literacy skills such as knowing that print is read from left to right. In addition, in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, when the effects of preschool education would be most apparent, US students, without government preschool standards, handily best their universally preschooled peers in international comparisons of reading math and science. It is only after 8 or 12 years in the public system that these students fall to the bottom of the heap. That is an indictment of the K-12 system, not a lack of preschool programs or standards. None of the preschool programs supported in Minnesota or nationally have been effective in closing the "readiness gap" despite 40 years, \$50 billion federal dollars just for Head Start alone, and at least 600 studies. Minnesota's legislative auditor found no benefit of any of Minnesota's early childhood programs, only evidence of fiscal mismanagement.**

**There is nothing to stop the private sector from funding and helping disadvantaged children to enter preschool, even though it does little good, or tutoring them after they enter school. They do not need to become entwined in public private partnerships.**

- 2) Q: Are the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress developed by the Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services "controversial government standards' for children from birth through four that include things like 'sex-education and social activism?'"

**Ready4K Myths:**

No. President Bush's Good Start, Grow Smart initiative called on states and local communities to strengthen early learning for young children and to develop Early Learning guidelines for children 0-5 years of age. The Early Childhood Indicators of Progress is Minnesota's response to President Bush's early childhood initiative. States have been asked to develop quality criteria for early childhood education, including voluntary guidelines on pre-reading and language skills, activities that align with State K-12 standards, and to make that information available to parents, teachers and caregivers. The Early Childhood Indicators of Progress is supported by a large body of national research that supports the relationship between early childhood experiences and successful learning outcomes. It does not teach sex-education or social activism....”

**EdAction Facts:**

We are glad that Ready4K is actually being honest about the federal role in the expansion of state early childhood programs. One of Good Start Grow Smart’s major initiatives says, “Partner with states to improve early childhood education,” including “voluntary guidelines...that align with the state K-12 standards.” This federal program is admitting that they want states to extend the same controversial federal imposition of standards and assessments down to our youngest children. Federally imposed standards have been a major bone of contention as a result of Goals 2000, which gave us the Profile of Learning, as well as No Child Left Behind. 80% of Minnesota’s congressional delegation voted against NCLB. There have been many bills in this legislature and others across the country to pull out of NCLB. Yet, Ready4K is pushing to have Minnesota submit to further federal control for “voluntary” guidelines that will become mandatory as soon as Minnesota accepts any federal funds to do so.

The “national research” that Ready4K touts shows only some temporary academic improvements as a result of preschool programs for the most disadvantaged, and these fade by the second grade. Edward Ziglar, founder of Head Start said of these programs, “This is not the first time universal preschool education has been proposed. . . . Then, as now, the arguments in favor of preschool education were that it would reduce school failure, lower dropout rates, increase test scores, and produce a generation of more competent high school graduates. . . . Preschool education will achieve none of these results...” (Emphasis added.) Ziglar also said of these programs, “There is a large body of evidence indicating that there is little if anything to be gained by exposing middleclass children to early education... Those who argue in favor of universal preschool education ignore evidence that indicates early schooling is inappropriate for many four-year olds and that it may even be harmful to their development.” (Emphasis added.)

Finally, for Ready4K to say that the Indicators do “not teach sex education and social activism” is patently false. On pages 15 and 55 of the Indicators document the standard is listed, “Support children’s developing understanding of their gender and cultural identity.” This job is assigned to teachers and not to parents, which is an extraordinary usurpation of parental authority. This standard is based on the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s radical Anti-Bias curriculum, which is listed as a resource on page 61 of the Indicators document. The Anti-Bias Curriculum contains teaching activities such as “Make copies of an outline of a body as drawn by a preschooler, and in small groups ask children to fill in all the body parts, and to show if the person is a girl or boy (p. 53).” and “Have anatomically correct dolls available...For example, tell a persona doll story where a few of the dolls ask questions about what makes them a boy or a girl (p. 53).” If that is not sex education, then we do not know what is.

The Anti-Bias curriculum has an entire chapter on activism with young children including such statements as, “Young children have an impressive capacity for learning how to be activists. (p.77)” That philosophy spawned the standard in the Indicators document on pages 47 and 57 that says, “Participate

in activities to help others in the community.” That language has actually been toned down from the previous iteration of the Indicators document under the Ventura administration that said, “Involve children in service learning and social action projects (p. 46).” Service learning is right out of School to Work. The current language is more politically palatable, but the concept is the same – little children are to be turned into social activists for government determined projects using the tax dollars of parents forced to pay for these radical programs. In addition, each section of the Indicators document has a to do list for policy makers containing such controversial items as, “Provide universal health programs for all young children (p. 52);” or “Provide resources for community activities and projects that involve children and families (p. 48).” So, a taxpayer funded document is telling policy makers to use tax dollars to dismantle what is left of Minnesota’s free market health system and tell families what sort of charitable and community activities they are supposed to be involved in and we are supposed to believe that it does not teach activism?

3) Q: Are the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress a "State required curriculum?"

**Ready4K Myths:**

No. The Early Childhood Indicators of Progress is not a curriculum. It is information about what children should know and be able to do to be ready for kindergarten. It is voluntary, not required, and there are no plans for acquiring one...”

**EdAction Facts:**

**These Indicators are curriculum because they encompass what must be taught. They are not voluntary, because they create the official norm for what children from birth through 5 should believe, how they should interact, and the worldview they should adopt. This is not the role of government. Official early learning curriculum establishes government-approved social and emotional norms by which all children and families in the state will be evaluated. This is extraordinarily dangerous, because government holds the power of enforcement as no other entity does.**

The phrase “what children should know and be able to do to be ready for kindergarten” is straight out of federal legislation such as the Elementary And Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which includes NCLB. It also includes Goals 2000 whose first “voluntary goal” says, “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.” This is the origin of the concept of “kindergarten readiness.” The 1994 reauthorization of the ESEA stated that in order for states to receive Title I federal funds they “shall submit to the Secretary a plan...that satisfies the requirements of this section and that is coordinated with other programs under this Act, the Goals 2000 Educate America Act and other Acts...” That same law from 1994 says, “Standards under this paragraph shall include – challenging content standards that – specify what children are expected to know and be able to do.” The Profile of Learning was Minnesota’s “voluntary” compliance with Goals 2000 and the ESEA’s mandates that were “required” in order to receive federal money. Ready4K has already admitted that these standards are in compliance with federal programs. These standards contain much of the controversial content from the Profile of Learning that was rejected by the public and the legislature. These preschool standards are the continued compliance with federal mandates and programs that will be required for Minnesota to receive federal funds and will also be required if preschool programs and centers want to be rated as high quality. (See below)

Besides, we fail to see how discussing gender identity or teaching social activism, as explained above, or teaching careers, environmentalism, “preferences,” or “exploring a wide range of emotions in different ways,” prepares 3 year olds for learning math and reading in kindergarten.

4) Q: Are the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress a "breathtaking intrusion of government into the lives and values of families?"

**Ready4K Myths:**

“No. The Early Childhood Indicators of Progress were developed to help parents and family members, teachers and caregivers, community members and policymakers take shared responsibility for helping children to be ready for school. It will be available for those parents and teachers who choose to use it...”

**EdAction Facts:**

**To have Ready4K and the state assume that parents cannot raise their children without their help or that it is their role to set standards on what is normal development is an intrusion. To publish standards that cover such controversial and non-academic topics as gender identity, social activism, environmentalism, and careers is an intrusion. To give more responsibility to government programs and teachers than to parents is an intrusion. To have the state and Ready4K assume that they should set normal social, emotional and mental health guidelines over very young children when expert organizations like the Surgeon General and the World Health Organization admit that mental health diagnostic criteria are vague and subjective and that it is difficult to accurately diagnose young children because of rapid changes in development is an enormous intrusion.**

5) Q: Will the Ready4K legislation 'test ("screening") all children for compliance with the required government curriculum at least once by age three, including mental health testing and assigning a student ID'?

**Ready4K Myths:**

“No. Screening is not testing. Screening is just a "flag". When school districts provide early childhood screening, it is mostly focused on physical development and health, and some socio-emotional development...In addition, there is no 'required government curriculum', nor is screening designed as a way to measure children's progress toward the Minnesota Indicators of Progress...The proposal to assign a student ID at the time of screening is an idea whose time has come...This proposal is in the Governor's budget.”

**EdAction Facts:**

**SF 906 again catches Ready4K in several more misstatements. SF 906 is one of the bills that Ready4K is pushing, and it says, “Every school board must provide for a mandatory program of early childhood developmental screening for children at least once by the child's third birthday.”**

**For Ready4K to say that screening and assessments do not measure progress toward the Indicators is also false. SF 906 also says, “The commissioner of education shall establish a system for assessing the school readiness of children entering kindergarten, building on the two school readiness studies conducted by the Department of Education in 2002 and 2003. The department shall also set biennial milestones for progress in the number of children reaching proficiency on all measures of the assessment.” Ready4K has falsely used the Department's assessment to state that 50% of Minnesota children are not ready for kindergarten. Commissioner Seagren rebutted their alarmist ads. The department's assessment contains the same domains contained in the Indicators document, and it uses the same types of vague, subjective, non-academic standards for measuring children as are contained in the Indicators document. For example, the areas in the Department assessment are nearly identical to the standards from the Indicators document on p. 18 “Interacts easily with one or more children,” or on p. 20, “Show eagerness and a sense of wonder as a learner.” This assessment is clearly based on the Department Indicators (standards), many of which are impossible to accurately measure.**

**Screening social and emotional development (mental health) is very dangerous because it is so subjective and will not always be administered by qualified personnel. As stated above, expert groups cannot agree on what constitutes normal mental health nor accurately assess children. The Surgeon General's 1999 report on mental health says, “The science is challenging because of the ongoing process of development. The normally developing child hardly stays the same long enough to make stable measurements. Adult criteria for illness can be difficult to apply to children and adolescents, when the signs and symptoms of**

mental disorders are often also the characteristics of normal development.” Prescriptions are skyrocketing for drugs the FDA admits are ineffective and dangerous for children. Both the House and the Senate omnibus bills require screening the child’s “social and emotional [socioemotional] development.”

The state student ID is NOT “an idea whose time has come.” It is bad enough that intimate school; health and family data is collected by the state and sent on to the federal National Center for Education Statistics starting when the child is in kindergarten. Now both the Governor’s proposal and the Senate bills would extend this screening downward to age three. Sources in the Department state that it is to comply with federal demands for data because Minnesota is not meeting some federal quota for identifying enough children as needing early childhood special education. Do we really want to further invade the privacy of young children and their families by adding this screening data that probes the psyches of young children and asks such questions as whether there are guns in the home or whether a child is “exposed to dangerous conditions”?

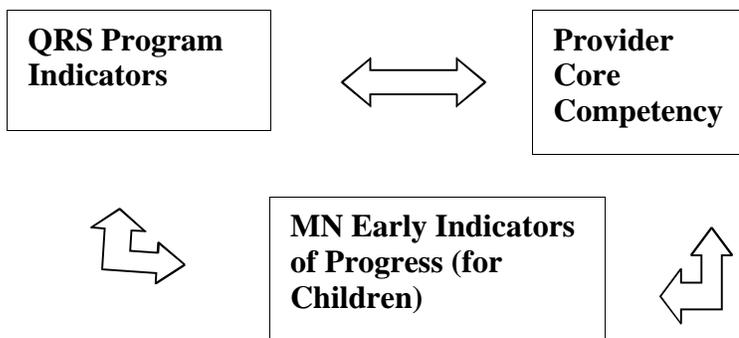
6) Q: Does the Ready4K legislation 'establish a state rating system for preschool programs based on these early learning standards'?

**Ready4K Myths:**

“No. There are no proposals to create a state administered rating system. The proposal supports a voluntary rating system run by a non-profit organization...The task force that developed the plan for a quality rating system was diligent in its efforts to ensure that a quality rating system would continue the state's tradition of supporting and encouraging all programs aimed at improving school readiness, including private and religious options.”

**EdAction Facts:**

To say that the Indicators do not form the basis of the quality rating system is yet another blatant falsehood. SF 592, another Ready4K bill, which establishes the standards, also says, “The rating system shall be aligned with the early learning standards developed by the commissioners of education and human services.” The “early learning standards” are none other than the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. In addition, during Ready4K’s testimony about this bill, they passed out a document containing a diagram with these interconnections clearly showing that the rating system will be based on these standards:



This rating system will not be voluntary, because if childcare and preschool programs want to receive referrals to compete in the highly competitive market or receive state or federal grants or funding, they will have to comply, regardless of their philosophical or religious objections to these standards.

7) Q: Is the start-up of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) really about "Corporations and Foundations Funding a State Take-over of Child Care?"

**Ready4K Myths:**

No. The MELF will be a new 501c3 nonprofit organization, that will provide an additional source of funds to test approaches that work, targeted to at-risk children and families, to help improve children's school readiness. ...The MELF will be a new public/private partnership aimed at supporting families in getting their children ready for school.

**EdAction Facts:**

**One of the corporate supporters from the Minnesota School Readiness Business Advisory Group said when testifying in support of MELF, stated that having children ready for kindergarten is a “workforce issue.” That statement is consistent with the School to Work philosophy that treats students, and now apparently toddlers, as mere links in the human resources supply chain for the corporate machine.**

**Ready4K is actually truthful in saying that MELF is a “public/private partnership.” However, these public/private partnerships are not at all accountable to the public, because any aspect of their work or policy that is the least bit controversial will be placed under the private side of the partnership and protected from accountability to voting citizens to which public policies by public entities are held. In addition, a complicated, unaccountable public/private partnership is not necessary in this case because nothing is keeping corporations and other entities from donating grants or scholarships to programs or individuals that they want to support now.**

8) Q: Is it true that the MELF will "give Ready4K our tax money to fully implement their plan?"

**Ready4K Myths:**

“No. Money from the MELF will not fund Ready4K...”

**EdAction Facts:**

**The version of the MELF in the House omnibus bill now says, “The commissioner must implement an early childhood development grant program...” “The program must include: (3) grant awards to improve overall programmatic quality including, among other things, a system to determine the relative quality of providers, proposals for early learning guidelines, and school readiness assessments” The “system to determine the relative quality of providers” is to be set up by Ready4K according to SF 592 and the Senate omnibus bill. Does Ready4K really expect legislators and the public to believe that they will receive no funding for doing this?**

9) Q: Does the MELF "put unaccountable non-governmental organizations in charge of child care policy in Minnesota, and isn't it a major shift in governance?"

**Ready4K Myths:**

No. The MELF will be a 501c3 nonprofit organization that is accountable to its board of directors, which includes both the private and the public sector. The Governor and the Legislature develop and legislate policy regarding early care and education, which is implemented through state agencies. Their role does not change.

**EdAction Facts:**

**Ready4K is incorrect again. The House omnibus bill says, “The commissioner must contract with a private nonprofit, section 501(c)(3) organization to implement the requirements of paragraph (b). The private nonprofit organization must be governed by a board of directors composed of members from the public and nonpublic sectors, where the nonpublic sector members compose a simple majority of board members...The private nonprofit organization is not a state agency and is not subject to any laws governing public agencies.” It says plainly in the legislation that the commissioner “MUST contract with” this organization; that it must have a majority of members from the private sector, who are not accountable to the public; and then that this private organization is “not subject to any laws governing public agencies.” How much more evidence is needed to establish that unaccountable agencies are in charge and it is a shift in governance?**

10) Q: Is this all really about Minnesota planning a "state-run system of early care for our children.a massive

system of state early childhood control. a massive system of government intrusion into the raising the education of our youngest children?"

**Ready4K Myths:**

No. This is not about a state-run system of early care for our children. This is about a state that respects the role of parents as their children's first and most important teachers; a state that supports parents and children through good public policy, good information, and adequate resources..."

**EdAction Facts:**

**Legislation that contains language like the following can be nothing but a state-run system and a system of state control:**

- **"The commissioners of education and human services shall disseminate information and provide training to parents and early care and education providers on the early learning standards developed for three- and four-year-old children that describe what children should know and be able to do to be prepared for kindergarten entrance." (SF 592 – Kierlin)**
- **"An early care and education program or provider that receives state money must be provided with a copy of the early learning standards for children ages birth to age five developed by the commissioners of education and human services to guide their early care and education practices." (SF 592 – Kierlin)**
- **"A public school must assign a child a student identification number, as defined by the commissioner, at the time the child receives a developmental screening..." (HF 872 House omnibus bill – Sykora)**
- **"A screening program must include at least the following components: developmental assessments that measure the child's cognitive, social and emotional development, hearing and vision screening or referral, immunization review and referral, the child's height and weight, identification of risk factors that may influence learning..." (Emphasis added. HF 872 House omnibus bill – Sykora and SF 1365 - Tomassoni / HF 1513 - Greiling)**
- **"The commissioner must implement an early childhood development grant program...The commissioner must contract with a private nonprofit, section 501(c)(3) organization to implement the requirements of paragraph (b). The private nonprofit organization must be governed by a board of directors composed of members from the public and nonpublic sectors, where the nonpublic sector members compose a simple majority of board members."**

State standards, indicators, guidelines or whatever fuzzy name they are given by Ready4K, that determine normal mental health and teach gender identity, social activism, environmentalism, etc. can do nothing but intrude into the raising and education of young children. Ready4K can call parents the first and most important teachers of young children all they want, but these standards and this legislation belie that notion in spades.

The bottom line question is whether Minnesota and Ready4K will treat children as "mere creatures of the state" or support parents' supreme right and duty to "train children in the way that they should go."