FIRST PERSON: EMPOWERING LOW-INCOME CHILDREN WITH HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

‘Minnesota model’ combines use of scholarships, Parent Aware rating system

The highest returns on investment occur if it goes to high-quality programs that are successfully preparing low-income children for kindergarten.

On the flip side, research from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Institute of Child Health and Human Development shows that low-quality programs not only don’t produce a high return on investment, they can actually set vulnerable children backward.

Fortunately, high-quality child care can come in many shapes and sizes. Addressing achievement gaps that best practices can be adopted in homes, schools, centers or churches. That’s great news, because parents want and need the ability to choose the setting that is right for their family.

As a former teacher, I have seen the impact of high-quality child care first hand. I think of a kindergartner who did not know how to open a book to read, opening it with the spine on the right. You don’t see that with children who have experienced a high-quality program. I am a firm believer that the first and most important teacher in a student’s life is the parent. But many parents, from all walks of life are working full time and need assistance; quality programs provide the help they and their young children need. So, when I think about child care, what I think about is adequately preparing young children to enter school.

What should that look like?

On the other side, from November 2016 to 2011, the Minnesota Department of Education showed that low-quality programs not only don’t produce a high return on investment, they can actually set vulnerable children backward.

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