



Office of Senator Omar Fateh  
95 University Avenue W.  
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3219  
St. Paul, MN 55155

April 15, 2024

Dear Chair Fateh and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education,

For most Minnesotans, a college education remains one of the most reliable pathways to the middle class. However, a myriad of barriers, like accessibility and affordability, often hinder students from obtaining a degree. For the one-in-five college students who are parents, these barriers are exacerbated by Minnesota's childcare crisis, making it nearly impossible to juggle the demands of work, school, and family.

We urge you to support SF 3806, which will help establish Head Start programs on community college campuses across Minnesota. Your support is crucial to removing these barriers that impact student parents.

### **Childcare is Unaffordable and Inaccessible for Student Parents**

Across Minnesota, childcare is unaffordable for most families, and even more so for student parents. We have the country's fourth-highest infant care costs; families currently spend 21% of their income on childcare for one infant (the federal government recommends spending no more than 7%). According to data from the Education Trust<sup>1</sup> a student parent would need to work 49 hours per week, on average, to cover child care and tuition costs at a four-year institution in Minnesota. This burden is even more unreasonable and unacceptable at community colleges, where more than 50% of students are eligible for Pell Grants.

---

<sup>1</sup> Williams, B., Bitar, J., Polk, P., Nguyen, A., Montague, G., Gillispie, C., Waller, A., Tadesse, A., & Elliott, K. C. (2023, September 11). For student parents, the biggest hurdles to a higher education are costs and finding child care. The Education Trust.  
<https://edtrust.org/resource/for-student-parents-the-biggest-hurdles-to-a-higher-education-are-costs-and-finding-child-care/>

In addition to affordability, access to quality child care is also a pervasive issue. Many Minnesota families encounter years-long wait lists to childcare centers or find themselves driving across counties to get their children enrolled. The Head Start program could provide more community college students with affordable access to campus childcare. Today, only four Minnesota community colleges have such a partnership (Alexandria Technical College, Pine Tech College, Minnesota State Community and Technical College - Detroit Lakes, and Northland Community College - Thief River Falls). And yet, we know it works. Access to affordable childcare, particularly services offered on college campuses, has been associated with enhanced persistence and completion rates among college students who are also parents.<sup>23</sup>

### **Bringing Head Start to Campus Will Boost College Completion**

A collaboration between community colleges and Head Start programs is highly advantageous and yields a triple bottom line: it assists student parents in advancing their education, ensures a nurturing environment for children, and will develop the childcare workforce in Minnesota by creating space on campus where childcare providers can get the practicum experience they need to complete their education.

We strongly encourage your support for SF 3806, as it will allocate startup funds to initiate the collaboration between Minnesota community colleges and the Head Start program, thus extending these opportunities to additional colleges statewide. This partnership aligns with a nationwide initiative and benefits from the guidance of experts from the National Head Start Association and the Association of Community College Trustees. This legislation will facilitate greater access to college education for Minnesota's community college students, empowering them toward economic stability.

Sincerely,

Lars Negstad  
ISAISH

Mike Dean  
Northstar Prosperity

Clare Sanford  
Minnesota Childcare Association

Cisa Keller  
ThinkSmall

John Runningen  
LeadMN - College Students Connecting for Change

---

<sup>2</sup> DeMario, Mary Ann M. 2017. "Outcomes of Monroe Community College Student Parents Who Used the Campus Child Care Center vs. Those Who Didn't, Fall 2006 - Fall 2014. Unpublished Overview of Research Findings."

<sup>3</sup> Reichlin Cruse, Lindsey, Jessica Milli, Susana Contreras-Mendez, Tessa Holtzman, and Barbara Gault. 2019. Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: National and State Estimates of the Costs and Benefits of Single Mothers' Educational Attainment to Individuals, Families, and Society. Report, IWPR #R600. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.  
<<https://iwpr.org/iwprissues/student-parent-success-initiative/investing-in-single-mothers-higher-education-state/>>.