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Dear Chair and Committee Members,

The bill proposed for Universal Preschool in Minnesota must stop!  While I believe that the intention of those in favor is to offer quality learning experiences for 4 year old children--evidence and research suggests over and over that this is not the what children need.  As a licensed educator, child care provider, and mother of three….I feel very qualified to speak to this issue.   Allow me to explain:

**In New Zealand, the entire country has realized that relationships with children zero-five is the KEY determining factor to success and learning.**  Children who feel loved, special, and cared for build their sense of worth, confidence and curiosity which fuels high academic success.  The entire country has made this their “curriculum” for all zero-five year old; relationship-based, quality care.

In **Finland**, where academically students out-perform the US by far,  the kids are encouraged to play.  **There is no formal training, schooling or curriculum until age 7!** They believe children need to explore, discover, be curious, play, and be physically active.  Each child is academically ready at different stages, but there is no formal classroom training until their brains and bodies are ready to absorb and learn.  They would never dream of sitting a 4 year old in a classroom.

**Study after study shows that children need less structure in their lives**, so that they can explore, create, have time to become curious learners, engage with the world around them and blossom.  No playground can hold a candle to the brain development that occurs when children are placed in an open field with a few sticks and tires.  They create their own “games’ and activities that encourage creative thought, build their self-esteem and make them curious about the world around them.  This develops their physical awareness of themselves, cognitive awareness of the world around them, build social development as they learn how to get along with others…..etc.

In **Canada**, they have **increased unstructured outside play** (recess), and amount of phy ed time for students.  Rather than worry about it taking away from academic study time in the classroom, what they found was that **test scores and achievement increased**!!  Children need unstructured time to be children--to feel cared for, loved, hugged, and to play and be given time to become curious learners.  They do not need classroom time at age 4!

We have known for years that there is a **direct correlation between the amount of parental involvement** in schools and the success of the children.  Common sense would equate that there should be a similar correlation between the **amount of time parents are allowed with their children form zero-five and the child's self-esteem, success, and confidence**.  This will yield curious children who are secure and ready to learn at an older age.

* **Perhaps the state could consider allocating funding that would allow working parents time to stay home with their children for the first two years of life--thus providing a stronger foundation for each child to grow on?**
* **Another proposal of these monies would be do offer a voucher system, where every parent of a 4 year old child would get “x” amount to apply toward the type of care they choose for their child.  That will give the rights and choices back to the parents!**

This bill tells parents that the state does not respect their choices for they types of care that are available for their children.  **The state should be empowering parents to choose for themselves what type of preschool education/environment they would like their child.**

This bill would effect my business, as parents will always choose something that is free over paying for child care--no matter how well-intended they are.  Child care isn't cheap, but I feel confident that I am able to provide a nurturing and supportive environment where the children in my care feel cared for, loved and I do not doubt they will perform wonderfully in school.   Universal FREE preschool is enticing because it offers relief for the working families’ financial situation.  However, it will put many a family child care provider in financial strain due to the loss of children we will experience.

Our country has the priorities and expectations for our nation’s children all backward.  **Perhaps Minnesota could take a stand and once-again become the educational “leader” and “trend-setter” it once used to be rather than follow the monies federally available?**

The power is in your hands!

Thank you kindly for your consideration.

Lori LaLonde, owner

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MN Licensed Teacher, Area Coordinator, Mentor, Board Member