

ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2008

BEST RESEARCH = BEST PRACTICE = BEST RESULTS = BEST INVESTMENTS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

OFFICERS:

Warren Staley, Chair

Retired Chairman, Cargill Inc.

Jean Taylor, Vice Chair

President and CEO, Taylor Corporation

Mark W. Banks, MD, Treasurer

CEO, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of MN

Mike Ciresi, Secretary

Partner, Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P.

BOARD MEMBERS:

Brad Anderson

Vice Chairman and CEO, Best Buy Co, Inc

Douglas M. Baker, Jr.

Chairman, CEO & President, Ecolab, Inc.

Peg Birk

Director, McKnight Foundation

Robert H. Bruininks

President, University of Minnesota

Kenneth A. Burdick

President and CEO, UnitedHealthcare

Michael Fiterman

CEO, Liberty Diversified Industries

Robbin S. Johnson

Past Chair of MELF Board

Art Rolnick

Senior Vice President and Director of Research, Federal Reserve Bank

Lauren Segal

President and CEO, Greater Twin Cities United Way

Charlie Weaver

Executive Director, Minnesota Business Partnership

STAFF:

Executive Director

Duane Benson

Director of Administration

Denise Garcia



April 2008

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) made much progress in 2007. Prior to 2007, our primary work was laying a solid foundation to achieve our mission: creating partnerships; funding a portfolio of programs guided by what the research tells us (or does not tell us); and better understanding the populations we serve. Our ultimate mission is to recommend cost-effective strategies for preparing children facing economic and other challenges to succeed in kindergarten by the end of the MELF timeline in 2011.

In 2007, we completed planning and program development and transitioned to implementation of most parts of this multifaceted model. We launched the Parent Aware quality rating system, the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program, the Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects in four geographical areas and the majority of the innovative grants. The coordinated evaluation design creates a rigorous process for measuring the outcomes of MELF's work. Our tremendous success in fundraising in 2007 has allowed us to enter 2008 in high gear.

Finally, we are pleased to welcome Doug Baker and Ken Burdick to the MELF board and look forward to the leadership each will provide as MELF makes the transition from planning and design into implementation and evaluation.

Sincerely,

Warren Staley

Retired Chairman, Cargill Inc.
Board Chair, MELF

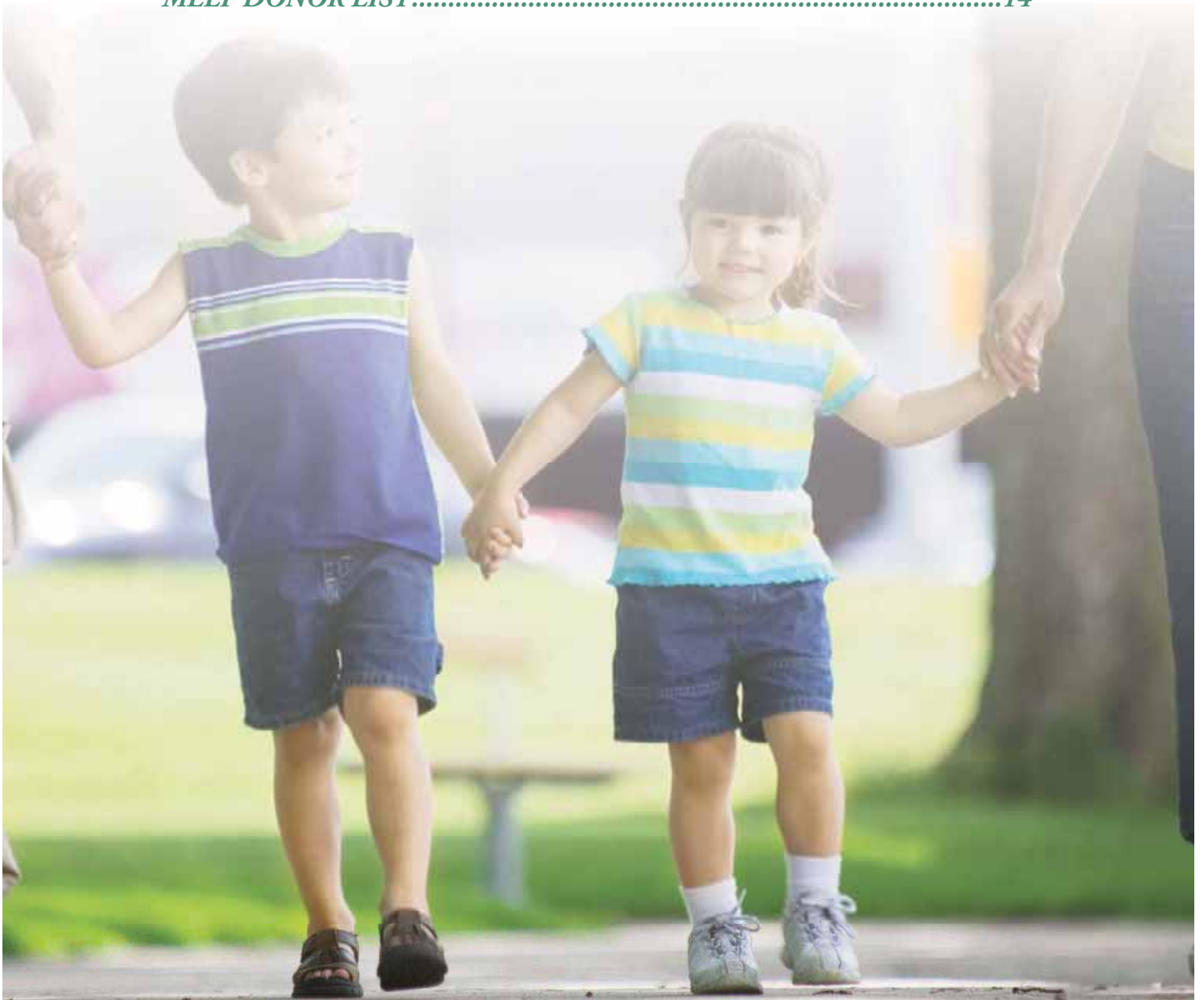
Duane Benson

Executive Director, MELF



TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>BACKGROUND</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>MISSION</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>A FOUNDATION OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>MILESTONES FOR 2008</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>MELF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>CATALOG OF MELF INITIATIVES 2007</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>MELF PROGRAM TIMELINE</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>2007 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>MELF DONOR LIST</i>	<i>14</i>



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.



MISSION

MELF's mission is to recommend cost-effective strategies for preparing children to succeed in school.

We are aggressively pursuing 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. We are weighing the effectiveness of various program models, supporting the empowerment of parents, and determining the valid short and longer-term outcomes and indicators. MELF is taking a "systems look" at the early childhood learning and education field in Minnesota.

The specific goals are to:

Identify Effective Models. *Identify effective, evidence-based models for parent education and early care and education programs.*

Empower Families With Better Information. *Help families choose the right kind of services to meet their needs, through evidence-based child assessment systems and quality rating systems of childcare and other early learning providers.*

Strengthen Provider Services and Feedback. *Determine how best to support professional development for providers of early care and education, and monitor program quality.*

Discover Efficient and Effective Services. *Identify a cost-effective set of services for promoting early learning for children from low-income families, and children facing other challenges.*

Find and Fill Gaps in the System. *Develop a vision for how funding, services, and policy can best work together to prevent children from falling through the cracks in the current system.*

Improve Evaluation Tools. *Develop ways to gauge how programs contribute to school readiness through measures that are based on real experiences of children.*

A FOUNDATION OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2005 & 2006 a solid foundation was laid based on strategic guidance, best-practices research and a clear picture of the needs of the target population in Minnesota. The following key objectives were accomplished:

- **Lean Infrastructure Established.** With the help and guidance of the governing Board, 501(c)(3) status was obtained and a very lean infrastructure was built for the organization, consisting of two staff positions, with a group of consultants identified for specific tasks.
- **Best Practices and Gaps Inform Program Vision.** A taxonomy of best practices for early childhood development was crafted by the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota (CEED). This taxonomy outlined the state of the evidence in the research literature, and identified areas in which evidence for effectiveness was strong and areas where there were gaps in the knowledge

that needed to be filled. This taxonomy guided the initial conceptualization of MELF's overall funding portfolio and evaluation plan. MELF investments were targeted to fill gaps in knowledge highlighted in the taxonomy. The taxonomy also informed the key elements of the comprehensive scalable community projects, which combine several best practices to assess system-level implementation issues and impacts across a range of communities.

In 2007, MELF launched three major areas of activity:

- **Ratings and Scholarships Launched.** Two tools to help parents were conceptualized and launched. *The Parent Aware* quality rating system provides parents with an online system they can access to choose a quality early childhood provider based on objective ratings. Providers were recruited beginning in the summer, and by year's end, 180 early childhood providers signed up to participate in Parent Aware. *The Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program* was developed to assess what the gains in learning readiness would be if 1) low-income parents were supported by parenting mentors and 2) were provided with the resources to allow them to afford consistent, quality care. This program also explores how the child care and early education market would respond to an infusion of parents with the information and resources necessary to choose quality programs for their young children.

Note: Legislation passed during Minnesota's 2007 legislative session established the Pre-Kindergarten Exploratory Allowances project. The purpose of the allowances is to promote school readiness for children who may be unprepared for kindergarten entrance by providing \$6 million in funding to help parents pay for high-quality child care and education programs. Families must live in one of the four MELF comprehensive scalable community project areas. MELF was directed to evaluate the Pre-Kindergarten Exploratory Allowances project.

- **Pilot Projects Begin.** *Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects* were launched in four geographic areas—North Minneapolis, two neighborhoods in Saint Paul, Wayzata/Plymouth, and Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties in Southern Minnesota. These projects are intended to increase learning readiness among low-income families living in these areas by funding a set of well-integrated set of best-practice strategies for early childhood education and development. Each project is somewhat different in how it leverages resources and networks already existing within those communities.

- **Evaluations Set In Motion.** *The evaluation process* was also fully developed and launched in 2007. This process will ultimately result in information on the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of various components of the MELF portfolio of projects. The University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) created an overarching plan for the evaluation activities, and MELF issued requests for proposals to evaluate the key components. Three other nationally-known evaluators were selected, and by the end of 2007 had fully developed rigorous, state-of-the-art evaluations to monitor progress and outcomes of MELF's work. Baseline data on children and families, providers and communities were collected in 2007, and data collection begins in 2008. See the MELF web site for information about the work of the MELF Research Consortium at www.melf.us.

Looking ahead to 2008 and beyond:

- **All Projects Implemented.** Getting all MELF projects off the ground and running at full capacity will be a major objective for 2008. This involves fully launching all remaining project components in the comprehensive scalable community sites, and any remaining innovation projects.
- **Evaluations Begin To Shed Light.** The evaluations will also move into high gear, as each component becomes fully implemented in 2008.

The evaluations will begin to provide information on the implementation process: what works well; where problems are encountered; and what facilitators and barriers impact implementation. This information can be used to guide and fine-tune how these projects are being implemented now and in future replications.

In 2008, it will be too early to begin to see progress on the key outcomes of improving quality among providers and increased learning readiness among children. However, the baseline data and evaluation processes will provide a good sense of our starting point.

Toward the end of 2008, we do expect initial evaluation results on implementation of both Parent Aware and the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program, as well as early results from several innovation grants.

- **Future Brings More Answers.** Between 2009 and 2011, evaluations of our projects will yield answers to the key research questions underlying our work, leading to the release of a detailed strategic framework to guide program and policy decisions and future investments in Minnesota's early care and education system.

This report provides information on the content and progress of each initiative in MELF's portfolio. The main focus, however, is on what we hope to learn: the research questions being explored, the evaluation approaches, and when results are expected.

MILESTONES FOR 2008

As noted, the primary purpose of MELF is to develop a well-documented knowledge base to shape a cost-effective early childhood learning system. One of the primary ways this is being done is through the development and implementation of demonstration projects testing out the program and cost effectiveness of various strategies. We expect to learn a great deal by monitoring the implementation of these projects, as well as assessing their results. To that end, a set of implementation milestones has been developed for 2008. These key evaluation indicators provide benchmarks for gauging implementation successes and challenges, and provide the basis for later demonstration of outcomes.

Parent Aware Quality Rating System

GOALS

1. Complete and post ratings online for 280 early childhood providers.
2. Parent Aware online system accessed over 4,000 times by parents and others seeking information on services.
3. Provide technical assistance to 50 early childhood service providers seeking to improve aspects of their ratings.
4. Generate lessons about the process of implementing Parent Aware through Child Trends' evaluation.

Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects

GOALS

North Minneapolis

1. Provide assistance and support to early care and education providers to increase the quality of care and to enable them to receive Parent Aware ratings.
2. Make Parent Aware ratings available to parents in North Minneapolis
3. Assist parents of 300 children in North Minneapolis to access state Pre-Kindergarten Exploratory Allowances.

Five Hundred Under 5

- Connect with 140 families to enroll a total of 200 children.
- Provide 660 referrals to community services and resources to support the school readiness and health of 200 enrolled children.
- Promote enrollment in the Parent Aware by speaking at all relevant provider information sessions, and attending program orientation meetings, and promoting 500 Under 5 at all appropriate and related meetings.
- Support 275 participating families in North Minneapolis in accessing the Pre-Kindergarten Exploratory Allowances.
- Monitor and network with Family, Friend and Neighbor grantees to compile research and relevant program information to assess needs.
- Offer two sessions of 500 Under 5 Parent Entry Point Classes.
- Initiate child and family assessments for all enrolled children by June 30 and complete by October 31.
- Communicate progress towards achieving milestones to partners, leadership team, program staff, and families and to the broader community before the end of the year.

Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects

City of Saint Paul

1. Provide assistance and support to early care and education providers to increase the quality of care and to enable them to receive Parent Aware ratings.
2. Make Parent Aware ratings available to parents in Saint Paul
3. Assist parents of 475 children in Saint Paul to access state Pre-Kindergarten Exploratory Allowances.

Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program

- Implement Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program.
- Enlist 75 early childhood providers in Saint Paul to participate in Parent Aware and the Early Childhood Scholarship Program.
- Receive Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program applications for 700 children in the North End and Thomas-Dale districts.
- Award 400 scholarships to families.
- Provide home-based parent mentoring to 400 three-year-old children and 300 prenatal mothers and/or children under one-year-old.
- Generate lessons about the process of implementing the Scholarship Program.
- Conduct child assessments and parent interviews in fall 2008 for 3-year-old children with scholarships.

Wayzata/Plymouth: Caring for Kids Initiative (CfKI)

1. Provide 40 children with full time or part time CfKI Scholarships.
2. Help 35 parents access the state-funded Pre-Kindergarten Allowances.
3. Facilitate the participation of at least three additional early childhood programs in or near the Wayzata Public School (WPS) district in the Parent Aware quality rating system.
4. Raise \$100,000 in private contributions for CfKI Scholarships.

Blue Earth & Nicollet Counties

1. Provide assistance and support to early care and education providers to increase the quality of care and to enable them to receive Parent Aware ratings.
2. Make Parent Aware ratings available to parents in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties
3. Assist parents of approximately 90 children in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties to access state Pre-Kindergarten Exploratory Allowances.

GOALS

Innovation Projects

1. Fully implement all projects and their evaluation plans.
2. Provide technical assistance to all Innovation Projects to implement evaluation activities.
3. Generate implementation data on all projects.
4. Begin outcome data collection and provide initial analysis.
5. Use relevant aspects of the measurement model in all Innovation Project evaluations.

GOALS

Research and Evaluation

1. Complete final research designs for all MELF projects, including tools and instrumentation.
2. Collect baseline data for all MELF projects
3. Collect first wave of evaluation data on both implementation and outcome components of each MELF project.
4. Generate a preliminary report on implementation lessons learned during program design and implementation.
5. Develop and implement an on-line database system to allow 13 projects to enter data to be used for monitoring, analysis, and reporting of both progress and outcomes.

GOALS

MELF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

MELF is investing approximately \$4.7 million to conduct research and evaluation of the MELF projects. The purpose of this work is to inform a set of cost-effective policy and funding recommendations for the early care and education system in Minnesota. MELF's conceptual framework lays out the logic underlying the projects. Our overarching research questions fall into those four levels of impact. See the MELF web site for a copy of the conceptual framework, taxonomy and the work of MELF Research Consortium at www.melf.us.

OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Outcomes for Children and Families

- *Which Approaches Prepare Children for School?* At the end of MELF's funded programs, initiatives, strategies and approaches, to what extent are low-income children in MELF-funded projects on a developmental trajectory towards school readiness or ready for school, as measured by a range of child assessment tools?
- *Which Initiatives Deliver Resources to Families Efficiently?* To what extent do low-income families served by MELF-funded programs and initiatives have access to and make use of the resources available to them to help their children be ready for school?
- *Which Strategies Deliver Empowering Information for Families?* Do low-income families served by MELF-funded programs have access to and make use of the information available to them regarding the quality of early care and education programs?

Outcomes for Programs

- *Which Programs Succeeded?* To what extent do MELF-funded programs meet criteria for innovative, effective, high-quality programs?
- *Which Programs Are Cost-Effective?* To what extent are MELF-funded strategies cost-effective? How does this cost-effectiveness compare to other initiatives in early care and education?

Outcomes for Communities

- *Which Initiatives Served Community Needs?* How have MELF-funded initiatives improved their communities' abilities to sustain quality early care and education programs?

Contributions to the Early Childhood Field

- *Which Learnings Help Us Improve Early Learning Outcomes?* How have MELF-funded initiatives contributed to the knowledge of best practices in early childhood education, as defined by the MELF taxonomy?

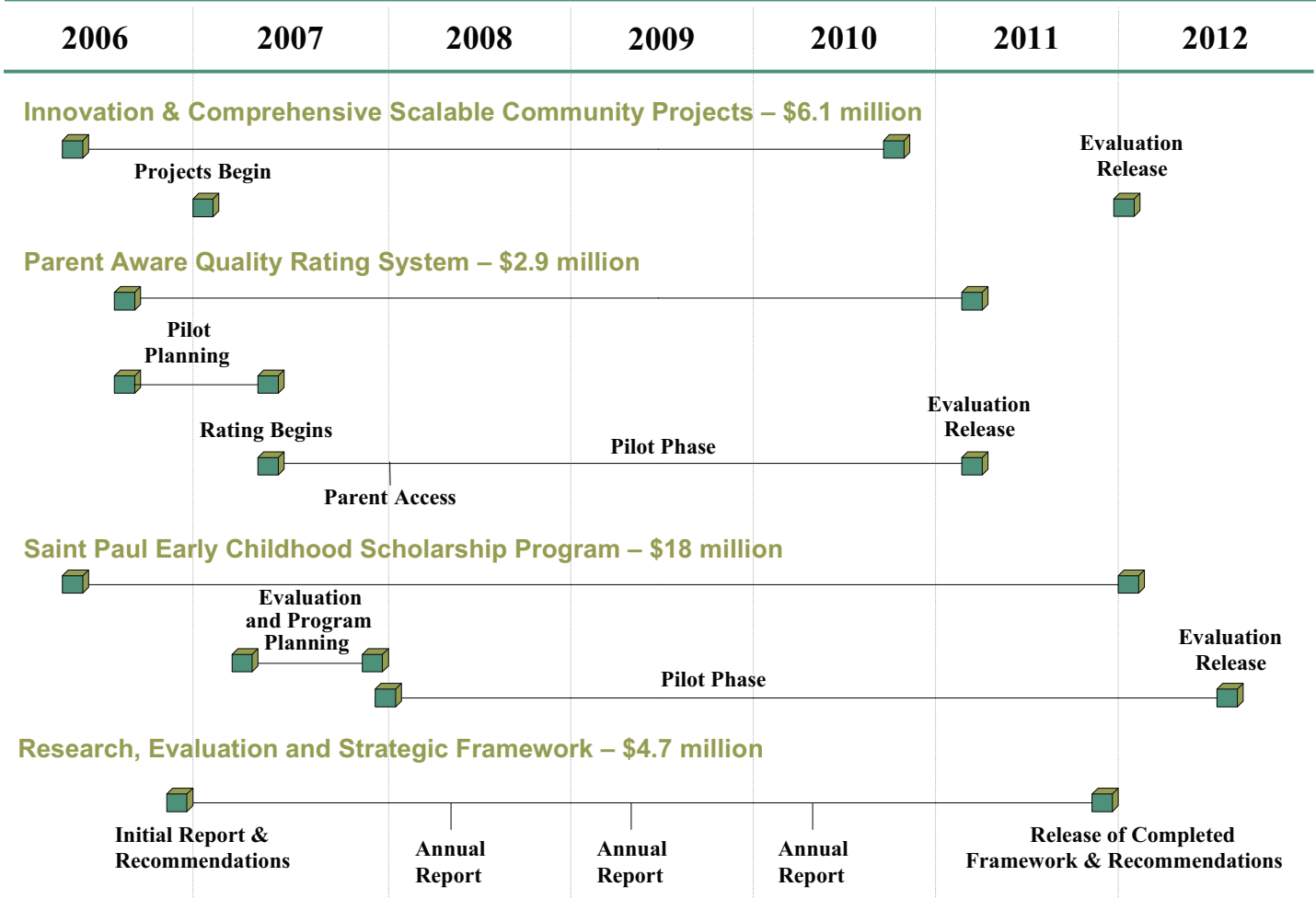
CATALOG OF MELF INITIATIVES 2007

1. PARENT AWARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

MELF is investing approximately \$2.9 million to develop, validate and release a set of tools to educate and empower parents to more effectively seek and select quality services needed for their children through a quality rating system.

Description: "Parent Aware" is the name of the Quality Rating System (QRS) developed as a tool to provide parents with information about the quality of existing early childhood programs, and to support programs in increasing their quality. Child care centers and licensed family child care programs voluntarily participate through providing documentation and, in some cases, allowing trained raters to observe their program. Ratings are based on points earned in the following areas, all of which are research-based indicators of program quality: family partnerships; teaching materials and strategies; tracking learning; teacher training and education; and child safety. The product of the rating process is a star rating ranging from one to four. The ratings are granted by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). MELF and DHS also contributed funds for providers to use to increase their quality. Child Trends is conducting the evaluation of Parent Aware.

MELF Program Timeline



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. Finally, MELF wants to ensure that families participating in the four comprehensive scalable community projects are using MELF resources to access high quality care. The Parent Aware quality ratings identify which care providers are eligible to receive MELF funding from families.

Unique/Innovative Qualities: Parent Aware is the only QRS 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 evaluating whether families actually use the system to find quality settings for their children. An advisory board of parents provides input for this project. Through in-kind contributions of marketing expertise from our corporate partner General Mills, focus groups with parents were conducted to determine how best to deliver information to families.

Key Partners

- *Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R)*
- *Minnesota Department of Human Services*
- *Assessment and Training Center at the Center for Early Education and Development*
- *Child Trends*

Pilot Sites: The Parent Aware pilot area includes all four MELF comprehensive scalable community project sites:

- *Saint Paul: North End and Frogtown neighborhoods (Planning Districts 6 & 7)*
- *North Minneapolis: Five Hundred Under 5 area*
- *Wayzata/Plymouth: Caring for Kids Initiative area*
- *Blue Earth and Nicollet counties*

Status: In the summer of 2007, Parent Aware initiated its recruitment process and 180 early childhood providers signed up to participate in the system by year's end. Program reviewers were recruited and trained in the rating process by the Assessment and Training Center at the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota. The process of rating programs began in the fall of 2007 and these ratings were available to parents starting in early 2008. Child Trends Inc. is conducting the evaluation of the rating system, and lessons learned through the development phase will be issued in summer of 2008.



2. SAINT PAUL EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

MELF is investing \$18 million over five years to provide access to quality early childhood education and family mentoring for approximately 1,100 children through the scholarship fund.

Description: The Early Childhood Scholarship program is the 4-year pilot of the market-based early childhood scholarship model proposed by Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. During 2007, the scholarship model was developed collaboratively by MELF, the City of Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman's office, the Federal Reserve Bank, the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Education. The Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship program provides eligible families in two Saint Paul neighborhoods with information and resources to help them choose, pay for, and stay in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs, including both parent mentoring for children ages 0-5 and early childhood program scholarships for children ages 3-5. Eligible families may choose early childhood programs rated as three- or four-star rating in the Parent Aware system. In turn, those early childhood programs selected by scholarship parents use the scholarship funds to increase and sustain quality programming.

This pilot has the goal of providing parent mentoring and scholarships for approximately 1,100 low-income children ages prenatal to age 5 by 2011. This project is coordinated by the City of Saint Paul in collaboration with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and funded by MELF. Administrative partners include Resources for Child Caring and Saint Paul Ramsey County Department of Public Health. The evaluation is being conducted by SRI International, working closely with the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota.

Why Needed: An emerging body of research shows that children's development of skills for later success starts immediately after birth, and continues through the preschool years. 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 programs offer support, only approximately 60% of low-income children are currently served. The Scholarship Program 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 children enter kindergarten.

Unique/Innovative Qualities: This will be the first intensive piloting and evaluation of the market-driven scholarship model that has received much national attention since the release of the Rolnick and Grunewald paper in March 2003.

Key Partners

- *Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis*
- *City of Saint Paul Mayor Christopher B. Coleman's Office*
- *Resources for Child Caring*
- *Saint Paul Ramsey County Department of Public Health*
- *Saint Paul Advisory Group*
- *SRI International*
- *University of Minnesota – Center for Early Education and Development (CEED)*

Pilot Site

- *Saint Paul: North End and Frogtown neighborhoods (Planning Districts 6 & 7)*

Status: In 2007, the protocol for the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program was finalized and contracts were issued for its management and evaluation. Starting in 2008, families will be recruited to apply for the funds through our community partners.

3. COMPREHENSIVE SCALABLE COMMUNITY PROJECTS

There are four projects in distinct geographical areas which are designed to help communities implement key proven and promising practices using local community partners and then assess the impacts on a population in terms of learning readiness. These projects are intended to explore how best to support communities to build capacity and implement strategies for learning readiness, to see what barriers and challenges exist, and assess cost-effectiveness of comprehensive change.

Description: MELF provides financial and logistical support for four key site-based initiatives with high levels of identified need: North Minneapolis, Saint Paul Citywide, Wayzata/Plymouth in Western Hennepin County, and Nicollet/Blue Earth Counties. Through these community-based efforts, MELF seeks to 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 all include the following approaches, tailored to meet the needs and tap the resources existing in each community:

- *Foster the development of strategic and practical partnerships in the geographic area;*
- *Pilot the implementation of the Parent Aware quality rating system;*
- *Provide early childhood scholarships of various types and amounts when stable resources do not exist that enable families to provide for continuous and high-quality care;*

- *Provide home visiting, mentoring and/or other strategies to reach and assist hard-to-engage parents;*
- *Identify and fill gaps so that a system of quality programs are in place;*
- *Work to involve high levels of commitment and coordination of public/private entities; and*
- *Evaluate the impact of Parent Aware and the state-funded Pre-Kindergarten Allowances in all target communities.*

Why Needed: The four Comprehensive Scalable Community Projects implement various system elements in order to allow MELF to explore how parts of a system might work together. These projects use various approaches to address the supply of quality early care and education program slots within a community. They also test approaches to affecting demand by supporting families in choosing quality programs and providing resources necessary for families to access those programs, even as their incomes fluctuate. The evaluation will provide formative information about the challenges of implementing and coordinating systems. Evaluation will also provide findings about how implementation can be adapted to different contingencies across these diverse sites, as well as summary findings that document the cumulative impacts on learning readiness.

Status: Planning grant activities were conducted in all project areas in 2007 to support the efforts of the primary community partners. By January 2008, all projects were in various stages of implementation, according to the plans developed during 2007.

4. INNOVATION PROJECTS

Nine projects are underway across the state to test out promising practices and programs for specific populations.

Description: There are currently nine innovation projects funded by MELF, all carefully selected to identify effective elements of the early care and education system. They include projects promoting kindergarten readiness for at-risk, low-income families across Minnesota. The projects vary in size, number of families served, child target age (e.g, infants and toddlers versus preschoolers), and type of program (e.g., home-visiting, preschool, child care, early childhood special education, and systemic/community factors/building partnerships).

All Innovation Projects are implementing evaluation plans developed in cooperation with the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development. Each evaluation will incorporate the use of a common measurement model (i.e., the same measures of demographic variables, program quality, parenting, and child outcomes) to the greatest extent possible. This will allow for summary statements and conclusions to be made across the Innovation Projects and the other MELF-funded projects.

The goals of the evaluation of the Innovation Projects include:

- *Evaluating the implementation and effectiveness, including cost-effectiveness, of each individual Innovation Project; and*
- *Summarizing findings across the Innovation Projects and the other MELF-funded initiatives to make recommendations for the types of models, and program and systems elements that are important to consider when making funding decisions.*

Status: All of these projects are entering their first or second year of implementation. The University of Minnesota Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) is coordinating the evaluation of these programs and providing technical assistance to sites to measure key process and outcome measures.

The MELF taxonomy illustrates how the Innovation Projects further MELF's goal of contributing to the body of knowledge about effective practices in early care and education. The taxonomy lays out the fit between the Innovation Projects and the strength of the current evidence regarding best practices in the field. See the MELF web site for a copy of the conceptual framework, taxonomy and the work of MELF Research Consortium at www.melf.us.



INNOVATION PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

1. ANOKA COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION, ANOKA

Anoka Healthy Start is a network of community partners working to connect families with young children to information, education and early childhood resources in ways that meet family needs and avoid service duplication. Anoka Healthy Start is currently focusing on reevaluating community needs, shifting towards an emphasis on school readiness, focusing on partnerships to serve children 0-5 across the county, and strengthening internal operations to promote systems change and better meet family and child needs. Key evaluation questions include:

- *Does participation in home visits result in improvements in (a) the quality of parent-child interactions and (b) children's developmental outcomes related to school readiness?*
- *To what extent do regular developmental mailings targeted to the age of the child (a) enhance parental understanding of key developmental milestones and learning readiness for children 0-5, and (b) keep families connected to community resources and supports as necessary prior to kindergarten?*
- *To what extent do service coordination and shared activities across Anoka Healthy Start partners (a) reduce service duplication, (b) increase both service and cost effectiveness, and (c) strengthen the community's ability to sustain high quality early care and education programming for children birth to 5 years of age?*

2. AUTISM SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA, MINNEAPOLIS

The Autism Society of Minnesota was funded to implement an intervention, the PLAY Project, for families of young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The PLAY Project is teaching parents strategies and techniques for interacting with their children to enhance their language and general development as well as increase their competence and satisfaction with parenting children with special needs. Key evaluation questions include:

- *To what extent does the PLAY Project Intervention improve outcomes for children with ASD beyond what is provided through Minneapolis Schools?*
- *To what extent does PLAY Project enhance parents' capacity to raise children with ASD?*
- *What is learned about using the PLAY Project across cultural and language groups?*

3. BLOOMINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, BLOOMINGTON

The Bloomington MELF preschool is currently being implemented at the Pond Family Center to serve low-income and English Language Learning (ELL) children to understand issues related to "dosage" (e.g., how does 1 versus 2 years in high quality, half-day programming make a difference for children and families?). The program began providing service to families in September 2007. Key evaluation questions include:

- *To what extent is the time spent in early childhood programs associated with increased school readiness, in particular, literacy development, in low-income, ELL children?*
- *To what extent are family contextual factors related to school readiness, in particular, literacy development?*
- *To what extent does involvement in preschool program enhance parent engagement and parenting skills in low-income, ELL parents?*

4. JOYCE PRESCHOOL, MINNEAPOLIS

Joyce Preschool was granted MELF funds to hone and share their unique dual-immersion model for serving ELL families. Evaluation efforts will focus on how effective the dual-immersion program is for ELL children, the process for identifying and implementing best practices, and honing and sharing the resulting model with other interested programs. Key evaluation questions include:

- *How can this dual-immersion model be honed and shared with the early childhood community to promote optimal outcomes for ELL families and children?*
- *How are professional development activities and program components selected and embedded into program practices?*
- *How are assessment systems used to improve instructional quality and the overall model?*

5. MINNESOTA HEAD START CHILD OUTCOMES PROJECT, STATEWIDE

The Head Start Association was funded to implement a computer-based assessment system that will aggregate child assessment data across Minnesota and support the interpretation and use of child assessment data. Challenges to the implementation process in

different settings, the quality of data collected, and the effectiveness of professional development on assessment will be evaluated. Eighteen programs have signed on to use the online assessment tools encouraged by the Minnesota Head Start Association. Professional development around data collection and online reporting began in October 2007. Key evaluation questions include:

- *To what extent can Minnesota Head Start aggregate data statewide?*
- *To what extent is the aggregated data complete and of high quality?*
- *To what extent are Head Start teachers able to use child assessment information to improve instructional quality?*
- *How can this statewide aggregated data best be used by the key stakeholders in Minnesota Head Start?*

6. PARENT EDUCATION MODELS: ANOKA-HENNEPIN, SAINT PAUL AND WASECA

Three Early Childhood Family Education sites (Waseca, Saint Paul, Anoka-Hennepin) are interested in identifying new ways of successfully engaging hard-to-reach families. Each site will a) recruit 80 families who are currently not being reached by the early childhood offerings and b) implement the Born to Learn Plus Curriculum (a combination of home-visiting and peer-led parent education). Key evaluation questions include:

- *Is the Born-to-Learn Plus model an effective model for serving hard-to-reach families?*
- *What characteristics of the providers relate to improved outcomes for families and children?*
- *Is the Born-to-Learn Plus model more effective for particular families?*

7. SAINT PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS (SPSS), SAINT PAUL

Project Early Kindergarten (PEK) is a program designed to help English Language Learner and low-income families in Saint Paul prepare their children for school. MELF funds are aimed at providing an intentional and smooth link between community-based providers and the Saint Paul schools. Professional development and training opportunities based on the Saint Paul Public Schools curriculum are offered to early childhood educators (center-based and family care) to better transition children into Kindergarten. Key evaluation questions include:

- *To what extent are PEK childcare settings literacy-rich in classroom environment and instructional practice and aligned with St Paul Public Schools?*
- *To what extent are PEK childcare providers serving the target population?*
- *For what length of time are children enrolled in PEK childcare, and during what age period?*
- *What other childcare and early education experiences to PEK children have?*
- *To what extent are the linkages between St Paul Public Schools and child care providers strengthened?*
- *How effective is PEK childcare in preparing children for kindergarten?*

8. SUBURBAN RAMSEY FAMILY COLLABORATIVE, ROSEVILLE

The SFRC grant is a collaboration of four school districts (Moundsview, North Saint Paul, Roseville, and White Bear Lake) that was funded to improve literacy for the increasing population of language and culturally isolated families and other isolated families in their communities. Priorities for the grant include building cross-sector partnerships, improving strategies to identify and serve isolated families in their communities, and increasing formal and informal connections between ELL/Immigrant families and the business sector. Key evaluation questions include:

- *To what extent are partnerships functioning—both in terms of the school districts and SFRC?*
- *To what extent are communities successful in identifying and serving unconnected families in the four communities?*

9. WILDER FOUNDATION, SAINT PAUL

Wilder is conducting an evaluation to better understand the level of participation or “dosage” needed in Family Literacy programs for at-risk children to be better prepared for kindergarten. The study will help determine the most cost-effective level of Family Literacy services for low-income and ELL children in the state. Key evaluation questions include:

- *To what extent are different levels of participation in Family Literacy programs associated with gains in developmental skills important for school readiness?*
- *To what extent do different levels of participation in Family Literacy programs affect parents’ involvement in their children’s learning?*
- *What levels of Family Literacy participation are most cost-effective for preparing children for school?*

2007 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

MINNESOTA EARLY LEARNING FOUNDATION: STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2007)

<u>ASSETS</u>	<u>Dec 31, 2007*</u>	<u>LIABILITIES & EQUITY</u>	<u>Dec 31, 2007*</u>
Current Assets		Liabilities	
Checking/Savings		Current Liabilities	
Eagle Crest Capital	3,711,981	Credit Cards	
Total Checking/Savings	<u>3,711,981</u>	Advanta-	0
Accounts Receivable		Total Credit Cards	<u>0</u>
Accounts receivable	4,800,000	Other Current Liabilities	
Total Accounts Receivable	<u>4,800,000</u>	Accrued payroll taxes	2,995
Total Current Assets	8,511,981	Total Other Current Liabilities	<u>2,995</u>
Fixed Assets		Total Current Liabilities	2,995
Furniture, fixtures, & equipment	8,068	Total Liabilities	2,995
Accumulated depreciation – furniture, fixtures, & equipment	-938	Equity	
Total Fixed Assets	<u>7,130</u>	Unrestricted (retained earnings)	1,664,587
TOTAL ASSETS	<u><u>8,519,111</u></u>	Net Income	<u>4,851,529</u>
		Total Equity	6,516,116
		TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u><u>8,519,111</u></u>

* Unaudited 3/31/2008 – subject to review of year end accruals by auditor.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT, REVENUES AND EXPENSES (JANUARY 1, 2006- DECEMBER 31, 2007)

<u>SUPPORT AND REVENUES</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007*</u>	<u>UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007*</u>
Contributed Support	683,324	9,463,203	Beginning	1,891,374	1,898,851
Earned Revenues	87,643	108,067	Ending	\$1,898,851	\$8,750,380
Total Support and Revenues	770,967	9,571,270	Program %	75.16%	89.22%
EXPENSES	2006	2007*	Administrative %	8.68%	9.61%
Program Costs	573,857	2,426,615	Fundraising %	16.16%	1.17%
Administrative	66,245	261,266			
Fund Raising Costs	123,388	31,860			
Total Expenses	763,490	2,719,741			
Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	7,477	6,851,529			

* Unaudited 3/31/2008 – subject to review of year end accruals by auditor.

MELF DONOR LIST

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation gratefully acknowledges the commitment of the following individuals, families, foundations, organizations and businesses that supported our mission with financial contributions or donated goods and services during the past fiscal year. Without their support, we could not have developed the programs and evaluations necessary to find cost effective ways of ensuring that Minnesota's children from pre-natal to five from low-income or challenged families are ready for success in kindergarten.

Corporate and Foundation Contributors through 2007:

3M Foundation
Best Buy Company
Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN Foundation
Cargill Foundation/Cargill Inc.
General Mills Foundation
Greater Twin Cities United Way
Krisbin Foundation
McKnight Foundation
Medtronic Foundation
Opus Foundation
Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi LLP Public Foundation
Roseville Rotary
SuperValu Foundation
Taylor Foundation
Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation
UnitedHealth Group
US Bank/US Bancorp

Individual Donors:

Mark Banks, MD
Duane and Melissa Benson
Jack Brodt Agency
Paul Monson
Arthur Rolnick
Warren Staley
Richard Todd
Barbara Yates

In Honor of...

Duane Benson – by Medica
Duane Benson – by Rochester Area Foundation
Rob Johnson – by Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN
Rob Johnson – by Cargill, Inc.
Justina Shoemaker – by Laura Murphy
The marriage of Ian Whitney and Laura Murphy– by Paul Cantrell, Jane C. Bechtel, Cynthia Miller, Cailin G. O'Connor

Special Thanks to:

General Mills for marketing assistance to MELF
Target Foundation for gift cards to parents participating in Parent Aware focus group

Leveraged Resources

In addition to direct grants and donations that have been made to the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation, we have leveraged \$10 million from other organizations and units of government for MELF activities.



