



August 11, 2021

Dear Members of the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group,

I am writing today as CEO of New Horizon Academy, Minnesota's largest child care provider operating 75 high quality early childhood programs across the state. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Governor Walz deemed child care an essential business to Minnesota and urged child care providers like New Horizon Academy to remain open for families on the frontlines, with no option to work from the safety of their home. Our heroic early educators responded to the Governor's call.

Not only did early educators join the frontlines by showing up to work each day, they shouldered additional responsibilities to accommodate Covid-19 safety protocols, like running kids to and from the parking lot when parents were restricted from entering our schools and communicating with parents throughout the day despite having zero personal contact. Early educators assumed a tremendous risk at a time when there was no vaccine and the reach of Covid-19 was unknown. They could not social distance. You cannot feed an infant, change a toddler's diaper, or comfort an upset preschooler from 6 feet away. Education in early childhood is dependent upon close, trusting relationships with adults, and both the physical and emotional labor require close contact.

Make no mistake about it, the pandemic has proven child care to be the backbone of the economy. Without child care, Minnesotans with young children can't work. The economy will not recover without child care, and child care cannot be provided without early educators in our classrooms. Child care is suffering an incredible labor shortage. New Horizon Academy is doing everything we can to increase wages for our teachers, but it's not enough. Even though child care did get dedicated COVID federal funds those are a drop in the bucket compared to what our historically under-resourced industry actually needs.

You may have heard the statistic that we pay parking lot attendants more to supervise cars than we do those who educate young children. We lose wonderful educators each day to places such as fast food and convenience stores paying more with no education or experience required. They tearfully tell us they want to keep doing what they love and were trained for, but the need to support their families wins out. Shame on our society. We in this profession are working hard to increase public recognition of and investment in early childhood and its workforce, and getting these educators some support from the Frontline Workers fund is a small first step.

These vulnerable members of Minnesota's workforce have shouldered a disproportionate burden. Yes, the child care sector has received dedicated federal relief funds, but those are intended to simply save the industry from collapse, not reward those that have risked a lot for little in return. Please recognize our early educators. Praise and thanks are important, but must be backed up with material reward.

Sincerely,

Chad Dunkley  
Chief Executive Officer  
New Horizon Academy