

# Editorial: Age 3 to Grade 3 is a smart concept

Seamless education for ages 3 to 8 can close learning gap.

August 08, 2007

Star Tribune

## **BENEFITS OF PRE-K**

Low educational attainment is threatening the economic competitiveness of the American workforce, according to "Dollars and Sense: A Review of Economic Analysis of Pre-K," a national study commissioned by Pre-K Now. Researchers projected that universal quality programs for 3- and 4-year-olds would, over the next several generations, create 3 million jobs, increase annual U.S. earnings by \$300 billion and raise America's GDP by about \$1 trillion.

For more information and to read the full report, go to [preknow.org](http://preknow.org).

A lot of well-placed attention has been focused on preschool education in recent years, and for good reason. Studies demonstrate that youngsters with strong preliteracy skills are more academically successful throughout their school years.

Moreover, educational achievement extends into society in myriad ways: Successful students are more focused, better behaved and more concerned about their futures. They tend to grow up to become better workers, taxpayers and the foundation for a stronger economy. Yet just any preschool program won't produce those benefits. Quality matters. So does making sure that 3- and 4-year-olds have learning experiences that blend seamlessly into their early elementary educations.

That's what the Age 3 to Grade 3 concept can do and why it merits support. It is a learning model that focuses on getting preschoolers the preliteracy skills they need to prepare them for kindergarten.

Ideally, students would attend school in the same location from age 3 to 8 so that teachers at each level could be in constant contact about the progress of each student. But when co-location isn't possible, the early literacy training can still occur wherever the students are -- be that in day care, in homes or in child-care centers. A literacy director could help each organization use teaching methods needed by each student, whether that means sending in AmeriCorps teachers or training the child-care workers. That teaching would be coordinated with K-3 programs.

Bob Wedl, a former Minnesota education commissioner who now works with the Education/Evolving group, helped design the 3 to 3 model. He says the achievement gap too often begins by the time children start school. The 3 to 3 model "brings Pre-K and the primary grades together to assure all children come to kindergarten with literacy skills and are meeting standards in reading by the end of third grade."

Some Montessori schools already use the 3 to 3 idea by starting children that young in their programs. And Minneapolis public schools used a version of the concept by using AmeriCorps teachers to work with Head Start students. Students who were taught under the preliteracy model were 10 to 15 percentage points closer to being on course to read well by the time they reached third grade, according to district statistics. The Minneapolis school board recently approved sponsorship of a 3 to 3 charter school that will open in fall of 2008.

Minnesota has one of the highest percentages of full-time working moms in the nation. That means many preschoolers are spending good chunks of their days away from home in some type of child care. The Age 3 to Grade 3 concept could help ensure that those hours really count.