



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, April 11, 2024

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MINNESOTA FAMILY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS RECOGNIZE

Senator Aric Putnam and Representative Dan Wolgamott

The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) presents the Friend of the Year Award

St. Cloud, MN., April 11, 2024 – The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) proudly announces this year's Friend of the Year Award honorees. Senator Aric Putnam and Representative Dan Wolgamott were recognized as MNAFEE Friends of the Year in acknowledgment of their pivotal roles in advancing Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) initiatives. The award is presented to acknowledge MNAFEE's appreciation of contributions to children, parents and families and/or the publicly funded programs that serve them.

For years, MNAFEE's Advocacy Committee, led by dedicated individuals including Katy Smith, Heather Cline, and Susan Shorey, tirelessly lobbied for the establishment of two full-time support positions at the Department of Education to bolster ECFE programs statewide. Their leadership along with the efforts of committee members Betty Cook, Gretchen Dullinger, Jen Jaros, Jennifer Davis, Sara McKeever, Monica Potter and many others were instrumental in engaging the support of legislators across the political spectrum.

Senator Aric Putnam's and Representative Dan Wolgamott's commitment to championing the cause of children, families, and public education was exemplified through their roles as chief authors of the bill in the Senate and House, respectively. Their dedication and advocacy resonated with their colleagues on both sides of the aisle, ultimately leading to the measure's passage and inclusion in the Education Omnibus bill.

"MNAFEE is honored to recognize Senator Putnam and Representative Wolgamott as Friends of the Year," stated Michelle Berscheid, Board Chair of MNAFEE. "Their steadfast support for ECFE reflects their unwavering dedication to the well-being of our families and community."

The establishment of these support positions marks a substantial investment in the future of Early Childhood Family Education programs statewide. The increased collaboration and partnership facilitated at the state level furthers the mission of MNAFEE to promote, advocate for, and strengthen parenting education, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and early childhood programming in public schools.

The job descriptions of the ECFE Program Specialists were crafted with input gathered a year ago at the MNAFEE conference in April 2023. The announcement of these two positions heralds a new chapter in the history of ECFE which is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary serving young children and families across Minnesota. [\[LINK TO PREVIOUS ARTICLE IF AVAILABLE\]](#)

Senator Putnam and Representative Wolgamott were recognized at the MNAEFE Annual Conference in St. Cloud on April 11, 2024.

About MNAFEE: The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) is a non-profit association promoting parent education, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and early childhood programming in public schools.

About the Friend of the Year Award: This award is presented to an individual, group, or organization who has made significant contributions to the fields of parent education, Early Childhood Family Education, and/or early childhood programming in public schools in Minnesota and thereby has been a champion for young children, parents and/or families, and/or the publicly funded programs that serve them. The individual, group or organization does not provide consistent direct service within parent education, Early Childhood Family Education, or early childhood programming in public schools in Minnesota.

Nominees for the MNAFEE Friend of the Year Award must:

- reside or have resided in Minnesota or do business in Minnesota
- have made a statewide impact on the lives of young children and/or families, and/or the publicly funded programs that serve them
- have improved the quality of life for young children, parents and/or families, and/or the publicly funded programs that serve them.