



Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition

Disability Rights Wisconsin ♦ Madison Area Accredited Early Childhood Association
Milwaukee Child Care Alliance ♦ Parents Plus ♦ School Administrators Alliance
Supporting Families Together Association ♦ Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
Wisconsin Association of School Boards ♦ Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association
Wisconsin Council for Exceptional Children - Division for Early Childhood
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families ♦ Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Wisconsin Family Child Care Association ♦ Wisconsin Head Start Association

Working Together to Ensure that All Wisconsin's Young Children Get a Great Start

...by providing all Wisconsin children access to high quality early learning experiences and nurturing care so they are happy, healthy, eager to learn and prepared to succeed.

Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition Policy Positions and Response to the Governor's 2009-11 Budget Proposal

1. Improving Early Learning in Child Care

Coalition Agenda: Great Start Improvement Initiative

Wisconsin should launch a statewide initiative to ensure that children through age 5 have access to high quality early learning experiences in early childhood programs. To begin with, these efforts would target children from low-income families receiving Wisconsin Shares child care assistance. The Coalition supports the establishment of quality standards for early learning programs, helping programs meet those standards, and rewarding programs meeting the higher standards through higher rates or other fiscal incentives.

Coalition Response to the Governor's Budget Proposal

The Coalition supports the Governor's proposal to invest \$2.8 million over 2 years to establish a child care quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The Coalition strongly supports investing an additional \$3 million (at a minimum) to help child care programs improve their programs to meet quality standards established in the QRIS. We believe that \$2 million of that amount is available from federal stimulus funds already set aside for quality improvement in the Child Care and Development Block Grant. The additional funding should go for enhanced technical assistance, scholarships and wage supplements through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program and the R.E.W.A.R.D program, and grants or higher payments to programs meeting quality standards. We envision regional public-private partnerships that would leverage private funding to improve child care quality.

2. Home Visiting

Coalition Agenda: Great Start Home Visiting

To help new parents and parents with very young children enhance their children's healthy development and early learning.

Coalition Response to the Governor's Budget Proposal

The Coalition supports the Governor's proposal to strengthen the Family Foundations home visiting program, and supports efforts to expand training on high-quality home visiting practices to a broader set of home visiting programs operating throughout the state. Well-designed home visiting programs are effective in improving parent-child relationships and enhancing child development.

3. Four-Year-Old Kindergarten

Coalition Agenda: Great Start in 4K

Provide early learning experiences for more children through “community approaches” to 4-year-old Kindergarten (4K).

Coalition Response to the Governor’s Budget Proposal

The Coalition supports the Governor’s proposal to increase start-up funds for 4K by \$1 million per year, with preference for “community approaches” to 4K delivery. 4K provides strong early learning experiences to young children, enhancing their school readiness.

4. Child Care Tax Credits

Coalition Agenda: Great Start Tax Credits: Use the tax system to encourage parents to place their children in higher quality child care settings.

Coalition Response to the Governor’s Budget Proposal

The Governor supports the roll-out of child care tax deductions passed in the 2007-09 budget. The Coalition supports statutory language that would establish child care credits that are tied to use of child care programs meeting higher quality standards. Such a provision would provide an incentive for parents to use higher quality programs and will increase the number of children in beneficial early learning programs. Tying the child care tax credit to higher quality child care settings could reduce the cost of the tax credit. This additional funding should go into providing further incentives to child care providers to increase their quality rating (or maintain it if they already have the highest rating).

5. Concerns About Wisconsin Shares, the Child Care Subsidy Program

The Coalition recognizes the fiscal constraints facing policy-makers in this budget, and appreciates the substantial increases in Wisconsin Shares over the last 2 years. However, we would be remiss not to express our concerns about likely negative consequences to low-income families and child care providers due to proposed cost-saving measures: raising family co-payments, freezing payment rates again for a biennium, implementing an attendance payment policy that will result in further payment cuts to child care providers, and possibly imposing waiting lists. We support efforts, where possible, to ease the negative impacts of these policies, particularly on high-quality programs. We further hope these interim cost-containment measures contribute to a foundation on which to build in supports and incentives for quality improvement. We urge that any cost savings be redirected to those quality improvement efforts.

6. Concern: Head Start State Supplement

The Head Start State Supplement Program was one of many programs facing a 1% cut in the Governor’s budget proposal, resulting in a reduction of \$72,125. The Department of Public Instruction had initially proposed to increase the funding by \$2.9 million per year. The Coalition is concerned about the gradual depletion of per-child funding in state-funded Head Start through several years of flat funding. The state program now provides only 71% of the amount per child provided in the federal Head Start program, threatening the quality of services. We support keeping Head Start annual funding at least at the \$7,212,500 level.

