



Every Wisconsin child should have access to nurturing care and high-quality early learning experiences so they are happy, healthy, eager to learn and prepared to succeed

Outcomes for Kids: Preparation for School and Life

Crucial Development in the Early Years

Scientific evidence is clear that the first five years of a child's life are a critical time for learning. A child's brain develops at an astonishing rate during the period before he enters school.

Researchers estimate that 85% of a child's brain develops based primarily on her experiences during the pre-school years.

An Investment That Works

Research shows that high-quality early care and education helps children achieve in school and makes them more likely to become productive citizens. This is especially true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. High-quality early learning can happen in many settings: at home, in child care, and in preschool settings.

Outcomes for Families: Help With Early Learning and Child Care

Parents are a child's first and foremost teachers. They want their children to have early learning experiences before school that help them grow and develop. Working parents want their children in nurturing settings while they work to support their families, where their children are cared for **and** prepared for school.

Today 71 percent of Wisconsin's children under age 6 have all parents in the workforce, the 4th highest rate in the nation.

Outcomes for Wisconsin: Return on Investment

Economists tell us there are strong benefits from investing in high-quality early childhood programs. The benefits from high-quality early care and education programs extend into adulthood, including:

- increased achievement in school,
- reduced need for special education,
- lower crime rates, and
- higher earnings.

Research also indicates that well-designed home visiting programs are effective in improving parent-child relationships and enhancing child development.

These results are particularly strong when targeted to at-risk children, including children with disabilities and special needs.

James Heckman, University of Chicago Economist and Nobel Laureate:
"Investments in high-quality early learning programs have the greatest rate of return of any social investment."

Vision: Wisconsin is a national leader in early childhood programs

Goals

- *Improve outcomes for children in school and life*
- *Assure parents access to high-quality early childhood programs*
- *Help new parents enhance their children's healthy development*

How Do We Get There?

Assess Quality

A quality system must be able to define and assess quality.

Research shows that there are five elements in a high-quality early care and education program:

1. Highly skilled teachers
2. Small class sizes and high adult-to child ratios
3. A curriculum focused on children's development and learning
4. Parent engagement
5. Attention to health and safety

Research indicates that home visiting programs for parents are effective when the home visitor is well-trained and follows a detailed curriculum. Quality standards include 12 critical elements of successful home visiting programs.

Improve Quality

Professional development: Early learning quality is achieved through education, training, and technical assistance. Early childhood programs excel when teachers and home visitors are well-prepared and skilled in providing effective services, and are retained through decent wages and benefits.

State benchmarks for progress: A quality system has clear statewide benchmarks for success to be met at community levels.

Public-private partnership: Regional or local public-private partnership can mobilize resources and support to help programs meet quality standards. A good system promotes local engagement in assuring a great start for our kids, with clear benchmarks for progress.

Sustain Quality

A quality system needs a financing mechanism to sustain quality programs. To begin with, the state's largest investment in early care and education, the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program, should pay ongoing higher rates for higher quality. Parents should get information to help them select programs based on quality. Home visiting programs need to have funding sufficient to meet research-based quality standards.

It is time for Wisconsin to develop a plan to assure our children get a Great Start, with clear statewide goals and benchmarks, and local community engagement. Children can't wait!

Great Start is an initiative sponsored by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families and its 10 partners in the Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition. Coalition website: www.greatstartwi.org WCCF website: www.wccf.org
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