



Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition

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

Mission: *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.*

COALITION PROPOSALS FOR 2009-2011 GREAT START WISCONSIN

1. Great Start Early Learning Initiative

Goal:

To help assure that children under age five from low-income families served by the Wisconsin Shares program have access to quality early learning programs.

Strategy:

This initiative would establish quality standards for a strong early learning program, help programs meet that standard, and reward programs meeting the higher standards.

Rationale:

Extensive research demonstrates that investment in high-quality early learning programs is sound investment, producing significant short- and long-term benefits, including achievement in school, reduced need for special education, lower crime rates, and higher earnings, with particularly strong results for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program serves working families with income under 200 percent of poverty.

A. Establish Great Start Quality Standards

- Two levels: The initiative would have two sets of quality standards: (1) the current national accreditation standards or equivalent, and (2) a new set of Great Start quality standards for Wisconsin that are higher than licensing requirements but lower than national accreditation standards defining high quality (such as NAEYC accreditation for child care centers, Head Start Performance Standards, and NAFCC accreditation for family child care).

- To participate programs would have to be state licensed in good compliance and serving children funded by Wisconsin Shares
- The standards would be simple and research-based, including particularly:
 - Qualifications of teachers, directors, and family child care providers; and
 - Early learning environment and curriculum
 - Parent involvement
 - Professional practices

B. Resources to Meet Quality Standards

- **Help to programs to improve quality:** Resources would be provided throughout the 2009-2011 biennium to help WI Shares child care programs meet the higher standard:
 - A new regional technical assistance and support network would help programs improve early learning programs. This on-site TA would help programs improve early learning environments and curriculum, serve children with special needs, and nurture children's social and emotional development, focusing on both infants/toddlers and preschoolers. Technical assistance would be available to all child care programs, with a particular focus on helping programs to meet Great Start Standards.
 - Grants to child care programs would help programs meet the quality standards.
 - An expanded T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarship program would help child care personnel improve their skills and expertise.
 - An expanded R.E.W.A.R.D. wage supplement program would help programs retain qualified teachers.
- **Eligibility for Grants:** In this initial roll-out of the program, grants would be targeted to programs serving WI Shares subsidized children.
- **Great Start Grants to Centers:** Grants would help child care centers meet the quality standards by helping programs improve the learning environment and curriculum, increase staff salaries and benefits, and assist in sponsoring staff education with a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship, such as covering the center's share of tuition, and paying for release time and substitute teachers.
- **Great Start Grants to Family Child Care:** (1) grants could go directly to family child care programs, or (2) grants could go to establish family child care quality networks, with support systems to help family child care programs meet the standards.
- **Assessments(to be completed in the 2nd year of the biennium):** Any program could be assessed to see if they meet the Great Start standards. For programs receiving grants, assessments would help determine the level of grants needed to help programs meet the quality standard, or to verify that the program already meets the standards. Accredited programs would not need to be assessed, since they have already been through an assessment process.

C. Sustaining Allocations to Programs Meeting Quality Standards

Programs that meet quality standards would receive sustaining allocations over and above subsidy reimbursements to help them maintain quality standards.

- **Accredited programs:** Starting in January 2010, programs meeting national accreditation standards (or equivalent) for centers and family child care would receive quarterly allocations to help them sustain the quality standards. The sustaining allocation would include a core amount based on the size of the program and an amount based on the number of subsidized children. This

approach would replace the current higher payment rate policy in the subsidy system, but the allocation would be at least 10 percent higher than the program's regular subsidy payments.

- **Great Start programs:** Starting July 2011, quarterly allocations would go to programs meeting the Great Start high quality standard to help them sustain the quality. The allocation would include a core amount based on the size of the program and an amount based on the number of subsidized children served. In family child care, the sustaining allocation would go to family child care providers or to family child care networks. The allocation would be at least 5 percent higher than the program's regular subsidy payments.

D. Subsidy Policies: Payment Rates & Training Requirement

- **Overall increase in rates:** Maximum child care provider reimbursement rates would increase annually by a minimum of 2 percent across the board, effective January 2010. By 2010 all child care programs will have faced a rate freeze for 3 years, and programs in many counties, including Milwaukee and Dane, will have had rates frozen for 4 years.
- **Minimum training for all family child care providers:** All family child care providers participating in Wisconsin Shares would be required to complete two courses in early childhood.
- **Preventing substandard care:** Child care programs with a pattern of serious licensing violations would face sanctions, such as suspension from the subsidy program, refusal to authorize additional subsidized children for payment, or no increases in reimbursement rates.

E. Implementation

Great Start would be administered at the state level by the Department of Children and Families, with technical assistance and support delivered through regional hubs. The Department would set quality standards and provide overall planning, supervision, and evaluation. State-level scholarships and wage supplements would be available to improve staff qualifications and retain qualified staff. Regional hubs would be established to: (a) provide on-site technical assistance, (b) administer the grants, and (c) complete regional needs assessments of training and technical assistance. The Regional hubs would be designed to be public/private partnerships, bringing interested parties together to improve early care and education.

2. Great Start Home Visiting

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

Strategy: Expand home visiting programs that meet research-based standards.

Rationale: Research indicates that well-designed home visiting programs are effective in improving parent-child relationships and enhancing child development, particularly when targeted to children at risk, including children with disabilities and special needs.

This initiative would increase funding for high-quality home visiting programs, such as Early Head Start, Family Foundation programs, Parents as Teachers, and Birth to 3 Intervention programs.

Funding would be awarded via competitive process. The program would encourage home visiting linked to early care and education programs.

3. Great Start in 4K

Goal: To provide early learning experiences to more 4-year-olds using a community approach to 4-year-old Kindergarten (4K) through contracts or agreements with community-based programs

Strategy: Continue 4K start-up grants and provide incentives in the school formula

Rationale: Four-year-old kindergarten (4K) provides strong early learning experiences to young children and is available to all, improving school readiness. Research shows that well-designed pre-kindergarten programs improve student achievement. Delivering 4K through community partnerships offers greater options to parents, strengthens community-based early care and education programs, and improves opportunities for children with disabilities to be served in inclusive settings.

Proposal

- Continue the current 4K start-up funding through the biennium, with a priority for collaborative community approaches.
 - Permit school districts to count an additional 0.1 FTE toward state aid and revenue limits for each 4K child in a district that had a “community approach” for 4K delivery. Changes in the school funding formula do not increase the overall state budget.
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4. Great Start Tax Credits

Goal: To help families pay for high quality child care

Strategy: Establish a tax credit tied to quality, beginning the phase-in the 2011-2013 budget

Rationale: Tax deductions and credits help families pay for child care. Incentives for parents to use higher quality child care will increase the number of children in beneficial early learning programs. This approach has been successful in Maine, Vermont, and Arkansas.

Proposal:

- Wisconsin’s child care tax deduction would be doubled when parents use a high quality child care setting for children through age 5.
 - For those who have insufficient income to receive the tax deduction, a tax credit or refundable tax credit would be available. Parents would be better able to afford high quality, and children would benefit from a program that meets higher standards.
 - Statutory authority would be established to begin the tax credits in the 2011-13 budget.
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