

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Planning Grants Awarded for Community Approaches to Four Year Old Kindergarten**

MADISON – Organizations in 10 Wisconsin communities will receive \$10,000 each to initiate collaborative, community-based 4-year-old kindergarten programs, officials from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) announced today. The grants are part of the organization's Early Education Matters project, a two-year, \$1.3 million initiative administered by WCCF with funding from the Joyce Foundation.

Early Education Matters promotes a collaborative, community-based approach to improving access to high quality learning experiences for all of Wisconsin's children.

"We believe that collaborative models of early education for 4-year-olds provide the greatest access for all children, especially those most in need," said Charity Eleson, WCCF's executive director. "By involving all aspects of a community's resources for children—childcare, Head Start, school districts, transportation and business—we can create the kind of high-quality, stimulating and safe environment for learning that all children deserve."

"Getting children into a well-funded, high quality learning environment during this critical age is integral to getting children ready to succeed in school," Eleson said. "There is strong evidence to indicate that providing this foundation early in a child's life decreases delinquency rates, decreases the incidence of teen pregnancy, yields higher academic outcomes and increases the probability of high school graduation."

Research has shown that these early investments yield high returns for children, the community and the taxpayer. "This is preventative medicine that will reap significant societal and economic development rewards in the long term," Eleson said. "The Early Education Matters project is committed to providing access to high quality early education for all of Wisconsin's 4-year-olds. Community collaboration is key to making that happen."

The grants will be used in communities planning to develop community-based, collaborative 4-year-old kindergarten. Grants will cover start-up costs including feasibility studies, program planning and modeling, early learning standards training, location planning, consensus building, site visits, public awareness activities, and community surveys.

### **Specifically, the 10 communities and organizations are:**

**Elcho School District Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Planning Team**  
Betsy Gruszynski, 715-275-3225 x 239

**Green Bay Area Public Schools Early Learning Committee**  
Karen Vande Sande, 920-448-7330

**School District of Maple Early Childhood Community Partners**

Maija Alexandrou, 715-364-8465

**Menomonie Area Partners in Early Learning**

Nancy Estrem-Fuller, 715-232-1095

**School District of New Glarus 4K Collaboration Committee**

Barbara Thompson, 608-527-2410

**Oshkosh Area School District Early Learning Community Collaborative**

Patricia Vickman, 920-424-0460

**Park Falls School District**

Paul Tychsen, 715-762-3393

**Family Support Center/River Source Family Center (School districts of Stanley-Boyd, Cadott and Bloomer)**

McKinzi Simonsen, 715-720-1841

**Sauk Prairie School District 4K Community Advisory Team**

Michael P. Garvey, 608-643-5381

**Watertown Unified School District**

Chris Enockson, 920-262-1460

Based in Chicago, the Joyce Foundation supports efforts to strengthen public policies in ways that improve the quality of life in the Great Lakes region. The Foundation's early education grant-making efforts support the expansion of opportunities for and improvement in the quality of early education in Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan. The Foundation also makes grants in the areas of employment, environment, gun violence prevention, money and politics, and culture.

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