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Early Education Opportunities for More Wisconsin Kids Through Cooperation *Children Served in Community Based 4K Grew by 160 percent in Two Years*

Madison – The well-documented importance of high quality early education opportunities for children and the proven economic return as a result of increased success for kids who participate has led to more interest in programs that make kids ready for school. *Early Education Matters: Lessons Learned*, a report released today by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), found that school districts are increasingly turning toward community approaches in the delivery of four-year-old kindergarten (4K), with the most rapid expansion of 4K coming from those models.

“Community approaches to 4K offer a gateway for communities to improve early education opportunities for children,” said Charity Eleson, executive director of Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “Moreover, these partnerships make the best use of existing resources, offering parents better choices and creating opportunities for improving quality, which we know is critical in producing the best outcomes for children.”

Key Findings from Lessons Learned:

- * Total 4K enrollment in Wisconsin increased by over 4,000 students in the last two years.
- * In the last year alone, districts with community based programs accounted for nearly 83 percent of the enrollment growth in 4K.
- * Teachers in community based programs tended to have more experience teaching than those in school-based programs, but also tended to have lower salaries.
- * Well over half (56 percent) of Wisconsin’s elementary schools now have 4K programs, but 182 do not.

“We know that for every dollar we invest in quality early education for children we will see a significant return. As a former teacher, I know how important quality early education is for children. Community based 4K has given communities not traditionally able to offer 4K for their kids the opportunities they need and a benefit many other children already receive in Wisconsin,” said Marcia Engen, former Appleton Public Schools Teacher and WCCF Board President.

The report found that community approaches can create pathways for developing high quality early education in Wisconsin. The model creates relationships between Head Start, private preschool and child care programs and the schools, which can help improve coordination across the education system. The community model provides the opportunity to synthesize the highest quality elements of both the public school and child care worlds, creating higher quality outcomes and better serving the needs of working families. Those elements include teachers with bachelor degrees and certification in early education, small class size and parent involvement. Community models also can make the best use of existing resources—such as space, library resources and support resources—making the provision of 4K programming more possible in tight budget times.

The *Early Education Matters: Lessons Learned* report highlights the work of the Early Education Matters project, including the funding for 21 community planning grants and technical assistance and information sharing between communities statewide. Almost two-thirds, or 15 of 23 school districts receiving the grants have implemented or voted to initiate community approach 4K.

EEM grant communities that have implemented or expanded as of March 2006:

Bloomer	Elcho
EauClaire	Kiel
Milwaukee	Monroe
New Glarus	Park Falls
Stanley-Boyd	

EEM communities that will implement in Fall of 2006:

Chippewa Falls	Lake Mills
Cadott	Superior
Oshkosh	Watertown

EEM communities still working toward implementation:

Antigo	Black River Falls
Green Bay	Kenosha
Luxemburg-Casco	Maple
Menomonie	Sauk Prairie

Early Education Matters through the Wisconsin Council on Children will award another round of grant to communities interested in the development of community based approaches to 4K on July 10th, 2006.

Early Education Matters: Lessons Learned report is available online at:

<http://www.wccf.org/pdf/eemlessonslearned.pdf>

Early Education Matters is a project of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families in collaboration with the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, the University of Wisconsin Extension Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership, and Milwaukee Public Schools. The Project is funded through the generous support of the Joyce Foundation.

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