



# Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition

Disability Rights Wisconsin ♦ Milwaukee Child Care Alliance ♦ Wisconsin Association of School Boards ♦ Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Assn ♦ Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral Network ♦ Wisconsin Council on Children and Families ♦ Wisconsin Council for Exceptional Children - Division for Early Childhood ♦ Wisconsin Early Childhood Assn ♦ Wisconsin Education Association Council ♦ Wisconsin Family Child Care Assn ♦ Wisconsin Head Start Assn ♦ Wisconsin Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Assn  
***Stand Together for Quality Early Care and Education***

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## **Early Learning Coalition Formed to Work on Quality of Care**

**Madison** – A statewide coalition has formed to work with the Legislature and Governor to improve the quality of early education and care for children in Wisconsin. The Early Learning Coalition has twelve core organizations, representing statewide services to young children and families including: child care, services to children with disabilities, four-year-old kindergarten, Head Start and advocacy.

“Keeping children safe and healthy while their parents work is the first priority of most early education and care providers and that has been a primary focus of policies in Wisconsin. This coalition will work to make quality early learning a priority in addition,” said Jim Ryan, President of Penfield Children’s Center in Milwaukee, a member of the Coalition representing the Milwaukee Child Care Alliance and the Wisconsin Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Association.

The Coalition supports building on existing public structures for early care and education, including child care licensing to protect health and safety, support to help low-income families afford child care, four-year-old kindergarten, Head Start and Early Head Start services, and intervention services for children with disabilities. The Coalition calls for new efforts to help ensure that children and families have access to high quality early learning experiences by improving teacher and provider qualifications, establishing a child care quality improvement system, and expanding options for four-year-old kindergarten.

“Wisconsin’s parents of young children want their children in nurturing settings that help them learn, develop, and get ready for school,” said Sheri Krause of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. “Expanding access to 4K and improving early learning in all early childhood settings will help our children succeed in K-12.”

Sixty-six percent of Wisconsin’s children under age six have working parents. “Parents want programs where their children are well cared for *and* prepared for school,” said Shelley Cousin with the Wisconsin Head Start Association, adding that high quality early learning experiences are particularly important for children that come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Jeffrey Spitzer-Resnick of Disability Rights Wisconsin strongly supports improvement of early care and education settings. “Parents of preschool children with special needs want them in settings with non-disabled peers, but they are concerned about the availability of early childhood settings with staff sufficiently trained to meet their children’s needs during critical stages of development,” he said.

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Research shows that 85 percent of a child’s intellect and personality is formed by age 5. Recent scientific findings demonstrate that well-designed early childhood settings that promote healthy development and stimulate early learning help children achieve in school and in life, with particularly dramatic positive impacts on disadvantaged children.

**Early Education and Care Facts:**

- Investments in high-quality early education programs are cost effective, with the highest rate of return of any social investment, according to Nobel Laureate James Heckman, an economist at the University of Chicago.
- Wisconsin has a strong history of support for early care and education. Over 150 years ago, Wisconsin’s 1848 Constitution made a commitment to public education for four-year-olds.
- In the last 20 years, Wisconsin has greatly expanded four-year-old kindergarten and Head Start opportunities, dramatically increased child care assistance for low-income families, continued to build a strong system to serve children with disabilities, and developed a sound regulatory system to protect children in out-of-home care.

“However, recent policies have been more about access to services than providing high-quality learning experiences for our children,” said Charity Eleson, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “We are at a critical intersection for our young children. Improvements in quality, building off of the system we have in place, makes the most sense. As we look ahead to make sure our children are ready for school and eventually to our economic future, investment in quality early learning will pay off many times over.”

**Organizational members:**

- Disability Rights Wisconsin
- Milwaukee Child Care Alliance
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