



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

555 West Washington Ave, Suite 200

Madison, WI 53703

www.wccf.org

☎ 608-284-0580

✉ 608-284-0583

**For Immediate Release
April 13th, 2007**

**Contact: Charity Eleson 284-0580 ext 302
Dave Edie 284-0580 315
Julie Landrie 284-0580 ext 303**

Early Learning Strengthened with High Quality Opportunities for Children
Report on Early Brain Development as Essential for Later in Life Opportunity

Madison – A report released today by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) provides additional evidence that the quality of a young child’s relationship with his or her child care provider has a decisive impact on the architecture of a child’s developing brain. The report, ***Brain Development and Early Learning***, is the first in a series of policy briefs on how quality in early care and education matters as children grow.

“This report underscores the critical role that child care providers and pre-school teachers play in the healthy development of young children,” said Charity Eleson, WCCF executive director. “With 66 percent of children under six having all parents in the workforce in Wisconsin, young children’s experiences in child care will have a profound impact on their healthy development.”

The report cites a growing body of research that demonstrates the correlation between school readiness and the kinds of care and early learning experiences children have in their earliest years. Of particular importance in predicting school readiness is a young child’s verbal development, with researchers showing low-income children with a decided disadvantage in contrast with their higher income peers. Low-income children, according to the study cited in the report, have about half of the vocabulary of higher income children by the time they are three. Vocabulary is a significant predictor of school readiness and success in K-12 settings.

“We know that children from disadvantaged households are at higher risk to lack the vocabulary and skills needed to be ready for school,” said Dave Edie, WCCF early education policy analyst and a co-author of the report. “Rich language experiences, where children have active conversations with adults in a supportive environment, pave the way for school readiness, whether children are at home or in out-of-home settings.”

Research in neuroscience shows that a child’s experiences in the first few years of life are crucial in the development of the brain. The impressive body of research on early brain development is causing parents and policymakers to focus more intently on how to ensure that children have the kinds of interactions that maximize positive early development.

According to the brief, repeated positive experiences are critical to brain development. An established schedule and consistent routines in a nurturing environment help develop strong pathways in the cortex region of the brain, where the most complex functioning occurs, affecting decision making throughout life.

“Providing repeated positive learning experiences, hearing new words every day, daily strong social interactions and problem solving, and the ability to use small and large muscles every day are the foundation of brain development needed for children later in life,” said co-author Deborah Schmid, a brain specialist with WCCF and the Milwaukee Brain Team. “In the best programs, children feel safe and nurtured, and they sparkle with the excitement of learning.”

This case for public investment in high quality early care and education is enhanced by research on the high returns of early investment. The brief cites James Heckman, University of Chicago Economist and Nobel Laureate, who has concluded from his research that investments in high-quality early education programs have the highest return of any social investment, with particularly strong outcomes for children at risk. In a recent address, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke sites strong economic benefits research supporting early learning done in part by the Minneapolis Reserve stating “starting early in life is crucial.”

“Wisconsin has a great stake in how well our children learn. Our economic outlook is based on our ability to educate, and learning starts at birth. Brain research shows that early education experiences can make a world of difference for all children, but especially for children at risk,” said Edie. “The last quarter century of research should lead to a reconsideration of our public policies affecting our youngest citizens.”

View the full Brain Development and Early Learning report online at:
http://wccf.org/pdf/brain_dev_and_early_learning.pdf

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a state-wide, non-profit, nonpartisan advocacy organization WCCF: Celebrating 125 years Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count.