

## Federal Investments in Early Care and Education

### 2011 Investments

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families appreciates Congressional support for Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant in the FY 2011 appropriations bill, and for the funds to improve program quality and build early learning systems. Investing in high-quality early learning opportunities for disadvantaged children yields some of the highest returns of any investment, with significant reductions in later education, health, and criminal justice costs.

Wisconsin has made great strides in assuring that children have access to high-quality early learning experiences and in improving early childhood programs, including the establishment of a child care quality rating and improvement system, YoungStar. The federal funding has helped us sustain these important efforts, and has provided support to our low-income working families during a tough economic time.

### 2012 Challenges

Meeting the needs of Wisconsin's vulnerable children and supporting our local communities and families hinges upon support for continued investment in early learning in FY 2012. The overarching challenge is to address debt reduction without harmful cuts for early learning and development for disadvantaged, at-risk young children and their families. *In the midst of cost-cutting efforts, protecting vulnerable children and families should be a top federal priority.*

More specifically, we support:

- **Funding for Head Start and Early Head Start** at a level that allows all currently enrolled children to continue services and maintain program quality.
- **Child care funding levels to maintain services for children from low-income working families**, sustaining services to 54,000 Wisconsin children and helping the state maintain its quality assurance program, YoungStar.
- **Continued Early Learning Challenge Grants** under Race to the Top to help states increase access to high-quality early learning experiences for vulnerable children in a range of early childhood settings- in their homes and in child care and education programs.

### October Update:

As of early October, the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved a Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill for FY 2012 that includes:

- \$340 million increase for **Head Start** (enough to keep the programs that were started with ARRA funding open) for a total of \$7.899 billion. This funding level should maintain current Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Flat funding (no increase) for the **Child Care and Development Block Grant** (\$2,222,627 billion). This funding level will help maintain child care subsidies and quality improvement efforts in Wisconsin.

- \$698.6 million for Race to the Top, the same amount as the FY 2011 level with a provision that allows funds to be used for **Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge**. This would allow another round of competition for states. Wisconsin is working hard to be successful in the competitive Early Learning Challenge grants to help the state create a robust system for early learning and development.

Given the fiscal issues facing the Congress, we support these funding levels. The House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education has not marked up a similar bill.

In times of economic hardship, there can be no better investment in our country's economic future than supporting a solid start for our children most at risk.

*October 2011*

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