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WCCF Report Highlights Importance of Education and Job Training
New WISKIDS Brief Notes Connection to Child Well-Being

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) today released a new WISKIDS Count report that highlights the link between child well-being and access to education and skills training that leads to higher paying jobs. The report, “Working and Poor: What You Don’t Know CAN Hurt You,” outlines the impact parent education and vocational training has on children, and proposes several policy changes that would improve access to education and training.

Many low-income working parents face numerous obstacles in obtaining the kind of education and job training likely to lead to stable, family-sustaining employment. Far too often, those obstacles include workforce development system policies that do not lead to an investment in education and training, hindering parents’ quest for valuable skills and academic credentials.

“The time is right for changing policies that govern our Wisconsin Works and Workforce Investment Act programs to invest more in education and training, both to help poor households increase their earnings and to help employers meet their needs for a skilled workforce,” said WCCF Executive Director Charity Eleson.

“The latest Census Bureau data tells us poverty has been on the rise in recent years,” Eleson added. “We also know the growing up in a poor household puts a child at elevated risk of a wide assortment of bad outcomes, ranging from health problems to behavior problems to cognitive problems. Education and training have proven to be among the best anti-poverty tools around.”

The report notes that median earnings for full-time workers in Wisconsin increase sharply with each level of education attained. A worker without a high school diploma earned about \$24,000 per year in 2000. Graduating from high school increased earnings by over \$4,000. Some college tacked on another \$3,000, and a college degree meant another \$9,000 above that. The median for those with an advanced degree was over \$51,000.

The report also summarizes the correlation between parents’ educational attainment and a variety of indicators of child well-being. For example, mothers with less than a high school education are less likely to receive timely prenatal care, more likely to smoke during pregnancy, and more likely to have low birth weight babies. Maternal education has also been shown to be a strong predictor of children’s early learning success and language comprehension.

“Helping parents get an education and acquire job skills is one of the best ways to maximize their children’s chances for good health,” Eleson said. “It also helps ensure that the children are

(more)

ready to learn when they reach school age. Kids with educated parents tend to do better in school themselves.”

The report recommends several policy changes aimed at improving access to education and training, including:

- Allowing one-half of a W-2 participant’s required work activity to consist of appropriate education and training.
- Removing the job search requirement for W-2 participants who are making reasonable progress in approved education or training.
- Extend childcare subsidies under Wisconsin Shares to low-income families participating in education and training.
- Earmarking 50 percent of the state’s Workforce Investment Act dollars for education and training services.

The report also endorses several recommendations of the Governor’s Task Force on Education Excellence aimed at addressing racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes.

“Educated citizens make stronger communities and a stronger, more competitive workforce,” Eleson said. “Wisconsin has a shortage of skilled workers and we need to equip our workforce with the skills employers need. We can improve our economy and our communities at the same time.”

“Working and Poor: What You Don’t Know CAN Hurt You” is available online at <http://www.wccf.org/pdf/EdTrain.pdf>.

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