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Early Learning Matters - May 22, 2008

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Please feel free to forward this e-newsletter to any other interested parties, and encourage them to sign up for other WCCF newsletters and action alerts, including the action alert for the Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition at:
<http://capwiz.com/wccf/mlm/signup/>

Quote of the month:

“Wisconsin Shares is critical to the well-being of so many of the state’s hard-working families. It’s gratifying to see that Sen. Decker, Speaker Huebsch, the rest of the leaders in the Legislature, and Gov. Doyle understand the importance of investing in children’s earliest years.”

--Jill Jacklitz, Acting Director, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, May 12, 2008 Press Release

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1. Budget Repair Bill Adds \$18.6 Million To Wisconsin Shares

The Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program received an additional \$18.6 million in a budget adjustment bill passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Doyle May 16. The bipartisan budget adjustment bill was worked out in negotiations by legislative leaders Senator Russ Decker and Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch, working with Doyle administration officials. Senator Decker and the Senate promoted the child care funding in the Senate version of the adjustment bill, and the provision stayed in the final legislative package.

The Governor also directed that the "absence policy" implemented in March by the Department of Workforce Development to save money be suspended for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The funding was proposed in response to a cost saving absence policy implemented by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), due to a projected deficit in the Wisconsin Shares program. Despite a significant funding increase (\$69 million) for Wisconsin Shares in the biennial budget, expenditures were outpacing the subsidy budget for the current fiscal year (July 2007- June 2008).

Effective March 30, DWD reinstated a policy that reduced payments to child care providers when children were absent for 50 percent or more of authorized hours of care in a week, unless otherwise approved by the Department. This absence policy had been in effect for several months in 2007 before the 2007-09 biennial budget was passed. DWD estimated that reinstatement of the policy would save \$18.6 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008.

The Legislative bill added \$18.6 million to the subsidy budget primarily so the cost-saving absence policy would not be necessary. The bill included statutory language that effectively prohibited the use of the "absence policy" in the future. Governor Doyle suspended the policy, but he vetoed the statutory language, indicating that "the Department of Children and Families (which will operate the Wisconsin Shares program effective July 1, 2008) needs to retain the authority to implement the rule in fiscal year 2008-09 given the possibility of a funding shortfall next year."

In his veto message the Governor said, "I remain committed to retaining Wisconsin's tradition of broadly accessible, high-quality child care, and I look forward to working with the Legislature to ensure adequate funding for these programs."

The final result was \$18.6 million more for the subsidy budget and the withdrawal of the absence policy.

Press coverage on the Wisconsin Shares budget issues:

- Wisconsin Public Radio coverage of the issues includes comments by your intrepid newsletter author, Dave Edie. To hear the segment, go to: <http://www.wpr.org/news/newsstories.cfm>
- The Capital Times ran an editorial on the issue, quoting WCCF's Jill Jacklitz. Go to: <http://www.madison.com/tct/opinion/287578>

2. State Profile: Massachusetts Works on Bold Vision for ECE

Massachusetts has been on the cutting edge of early care and education, moving the agenda dramatically in last 8 years.

- Early Education for All Campaign was established in 2000 to lay the foundation for a high-quality system of early education in Massachusetts.
- In 2004, the state was first in the nation to create a Department of Early Education and Care. The Department, which became operational in July 2005, has a mandate that includes implementing universal high-quality early education for all children ages 3-5 and establishing a statewide professional development system for early education.
- In 2006, after years of planning by public and private champions of early education, the House and Senate both unanimously passed an act establishing the Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten program. The bill called for phasing in high-quality universal early care and education over 10 years, with a diverse delivery system including public and private preschools, child care centers, and family child care. Designed to meet a wide range of family needs for early education and child care, the proposal is perhaps the most comprehensive effort in the country. However, Governor Mitt Romney vetoed the bill.
- Despite the setback, legislators have continued to work toward a universal system. Since 2006, there has been \$99 million in increased investments in early education and care, including a pilot of universal Pre-K, expansion of full-day kindergarten, and development of a quality rating system.

Like many states, Massachusetts is struggling with a budget deficit, but the foundation is in place for steady progress toward a strong, integrated system of early care and education.

For more information, go to the Early Education for All website:
http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/eea/EEA1_accomplish.htm

3. New Federal Child Care Legislation Introduced

Senator Robert Casey (D-PA) introduced the Starting Early, Starting Right Act, which would increase access and quality of early learning and child care for low-income children and working families. The bill includes provisions that address increased provider payment rates, access to high-quality care for infants and toddlers, and improvements in quality through licensing, quality ratings and improvement systems, education, and compensation.

(Source: Zero to Three's Baby Monitor).

4. In the News

- An article in the Wisconsin State Journal focuses on the issues Madison faces in its efforts to establish 4-year-old kindergarten. Go to:
<http://www.madison.com/archives/read.php?ref=/wsj/2008/05/11/0805120286.php>
- A Chicago Tribune article focuses on investment in early education: "Experts Agree: Kids Need Early Education Programs. But How Early?" Go to:

<http://www.brainconnection.com/SITEWare/2008/05/01/knigt/5273-0061-EARLYEDUCATION.TB.php3>

5. Reading Room

- **New Study: Teacher-Pupil Relationships Most Critical to Learning**
A new study confirms that high-quality teacher-pupil interactions correlate more strongly with children's learning and behavior than rough program quality benchmarks such as teachers possessing degrees or small class sizes. An article about the study can be found at:
<http://www.virginia.edu/uvatoday/newsRelease.php?id=5217>
- **RAND Study on the Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood**
The RAND Corporation has issued a May 2008 quarterly update to Congress, entitled "What Is the Payoff of Economic Research for Early Childhood Policy?" To read the report, go to: <http://rand.org/congress/newsletters/child/2008/05/>
- **Early Head Start**
A new report from CLASP and ZERO TO THREE focuses on state efforts to expand access to Early Head Start. Go to:
www.childcareandearlyed.org/state_ehs.html

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