

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
555 W. Washington Ave., Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703
Phone (608) 284-0580

Early Learning Matters - December 9, 2009

Dave Edie, Early Education Policy Analyst

Quote of the month:

"For years, researchers have cranked out data proving beyond any reasonable doubt that children who receive a high-quality preschool education have a great start in life. They are less likely to end up in special-education programs, less likely to need remedial help, and much more likely, in every measurable way, to be a success.

The hoopla over Sesame Street and its 40th anniversary is well deserved. But it would be great to see this attention to landmark TV shows morph into attention to one of the great social issues of the day: how do we begin to lay the groundwork for a system of universal, high-quality preschool education that could transform lives that no TV show can fundamentally change?"

Ellis Cose, in Newsweek column, *Learning the Lessons of Sesame Street*, Nov. 13, 2009.
<http://www.newsweek.com/id/222618>

In this issue:

1. **WCCF Releases Comprehensive Early Care and Education Report**
 2. **4K Reaches 80 Percent of Wisconsin School Districts**
 3. **Five-Year-Old Kindergarten Now Mandatory**
 4. **Child Care Resource and Referral System Consolidates**
 5. **WECA to Conduct Early Childhood Workforce Study**
 6. **Missouri QRIS Study: High Quality Link to Gains, Low Quality Harmful**
 7. **Study: Even Low to Moderate Childhood Lead Exposure Causes Permanent Brain Damage**
 8. **In the News**
 9. **Reading Corner**
 10. **Check out the WCCF Blog**
 11. **Support WCCF!**
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1. WCCF Releases Comprehensive Early Care and Education Report

WCCF has released a new publication, *Wisconsin's Early Care and Education Landscape: Planning for a Coherent System*. Drawing from statewide data, the 52-page paper provides an overview of Wisconsin's progress in expanding and improving services for young children, strengths and weaknesses in our early care and education services, and options for an effective ECE system.

The paper is available on the WCCF website at:
http://www.wccf.org/pdf/ece_planning_system_11-2009.pdf

The report explores:

- Overall data and trends in early care and education in Wisconsin
- Access to ECE services for children and families
- The quality of ECE programs
- Early care and education systems in other states and in the military
- Options for consideration for developing an effective ECE system in Wisconsin.

The paper pulls together data on 4-year-old Kindergarten, child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, services for children with disabilities, and home visiting.

2. Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Reaches 80 Percent of Wisconsin School Districts

The Department of Public Instruction released data in December showing that 80 percent of public school districts now offer universal 4-year-old Kindergarten. As of school year 2009-10, over 38,000 children attend 4K in Wisconsin, an estimated 53 percent of all 4-year-olds in the state. A total of 333 districts now offer 4K, with 101 district using a community approach to 4K delivery.

To see the news release, go to: http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2009_59.pdf

3. Five-Year-Old Kindergarten Now Mandatory

Governor Jim Doyle signed a law in October requiring Wisconsin school children to attend and complete kindergarten before being admitted to first grade in the state's public schools. The law will take effect beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. Prior to this, Wisconsin law required that children begin school at age six. Kindergarten has been optional, but most children in the state have been participating in 5-year-old Kindergarten voluntarily. The bill appears to have been motivated by the growing evidence of the advantages of early learning.

4. Child Care Resource and Referral System Consolidate

The statewide Child Care Resource and Referral System is going from 15 separate service delivery areas in 2008/2009 to 8 coordinated Child Care Resource and Referral regions with greater cross-agency collaborations. According to a recent memo from Supporting Families Together Association, the consolidation was the result of careful planning to respond to structural funding problems, to ensure optimal access to services in 72 counties and 11 tribes, to improve accountability, and to have more "visible, consistent and recognized services that result in quality care for children and a higher quality of living in communities." The reorganization is effective January 1, 2010. For information, contact Lilly Irvin-Vitela, Executive Director of Supporting Families Together Association at (608)224-6162 or lilly.irvin-vitela@dpi.wi.gov

5. WECA to Conduct Early Childhood Workforce Study

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) will be conducting a statewide early childhood workforce study in partnership with Public Policy Forum, a nonpartisan policy research group in Milwaukee. The study will primarily consist of a survey that is being distributed to early education professionals this year. Researchers will use survey results to examine wages, retention, education, benefits, and longevity. Target survey recipients will cover a broad spectrum of the workforce to include family child care providers, child care centers, 4-year-old kindergarten, both certified and licensed programs, and Head Start. This is one of a series of early childhood workforce studies going back to 1980.

6. Missouri QRIS Study: High Quality Link to Gains, Low Quality Harmful

Higher star ratings in Missouri's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) were linked to gains in social/emotional and early literacy, and the study showed that lower quality (1 or 2 stars) **actually had negative effects** on development. This is the first study of a QRIS that tracks impacts on children that I have seen.

A key finding of the University study was that Missouri's QRIS program is not only an accurate measure of quality in early childhood programs, but also highlights the need to target quality improvement resources to bring 1- and 2-star programs up to at least a medium quality level (3-star) in order to ensure that all children can attend programs that benefit their social and cognitive early childhood development. For more information, go to: <http://cfpr.missouri.edu/MOQRSexec.pdf>

7. Study: Even Low to Moderate Childhood Lead Exposure Causes Permanent Brain Damage

Childhood lead exposure causes permanent brain damage with lifelong consequences, according to new research from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Researchers led by Kim Cecil used functional MRI technology to show that activity decreases in regions of the brain that control decision-making and emotional response in people who suffered lead exposure as children.

The results, coupled with previous research, show lead exposure damages all areas of the brain, Cecil said, including gray matter (the cells in which neural impulses originate) and white matter (makes up the wiring that carries those impulses throughout the brain). The scans showed that gray matter tends to "shrink" or lose volume in lead-exposed individuals, while white matter decays.

"One of the arguments we've always heard is, 'You see lower IQ. You see more behavioral problems. You see motor coordination problems in these lead-exposed kids. But you've never really proven there's any brain damage in these kids,'" researcher Dr. Kim Dietrich said. "Well, now we have. This is the first direct, neurological evidence of brain damage to children exposed to low to moderate levels of lead."

For more information, contact: reghan.walsh@dhs.wisconsin.gov at the Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

8. In the News

Lots of news since the last newsletter:

- **Kohl's Donates \$1 million to Milwaukee's Penfield Children's Center:** Kohl's Department Stores is partnering with Penfield Children's Center and donating \$1 million over three years to create Kohl's Building Blocks Program. This program will help victims of child abuse, young children with behavioral problems or children with significant disabilities by providing access to specialized educational and developmental services through Penfield. For more information, go to: <http://www.penfieldchildren.org/>

Education Secretary Touts Early Learning: U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, in remarks at the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Annual Conference in November emphasized the need for high-quality early learning programs. Go to the Early Education Watch blog for an overview: <http://www.newamerica.net/blog/early-ed-watch/2009/duncan-early-ed-can-get-schools-out-catch-business-16226>

- **Top Military Brass Endorses High-Quality Early Education:** A new organization called Mission: Readiness, led by nearly 90 retired military leaders, is calling for investments in high-quality early education. The organization

includes two former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton (ret.) and General Shalikashvili (ret.), and six other four-star generals and admirals. To see their report, go to:

<http://cdn.missionreadiness.org/NATEE1109.pdf>

- **Christian Science Monitor Looks at Educare:** An article focuses on Educare as a model of what President Obama would like to see develop from the Early Learning Challenge Fund he has proposed. Note: Legislation containing the challenge fund has passed the House and is under consideration in the Senate. To see the article, go to: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/1119/p22s01-usgn.html>
- **MPS Superintendent Calls for Community to Embrace Early Education:** Milwaukee Public School Superintendent William Andrekopoulos called for increased investment in early learning, including an endorsement of a quality child care rating system, in a op-ed in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Andrekopoulos indicates that "children - especially those challenged by poverty - who enter our schools and who have not had access to high-quality child care and high-quality early childhood educational experiences have been denied a fair chance to reach their full potential." See: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/65849402.html>

9. Reading Corner

- **Home Visiting Outcomes Report:** After several years of system development and refinement, the Home Visitation Outcomes Project of Wisconsin reports its first year of outcomes. The population for this analysis is 604 children under age 6 who were enrolled in one of the eight participating home visitation programs during 2008. To learn about the findings, go to: <http://www.chw.org/display/PPF/DocID/45172/router.asp>
- **Traumatic Childhood Reduces Life Expectancy:** A 10-year study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that traumatic childhoods reduce life expectancy by 20 years. For more information, go to: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=childhood-adverse-event-life-expectancy-abuse-mortality>

10. Check Out the WCCF Blog

Hey !!!--- Go to WCCF's Blog for the latest in children and family news:

<http://www.wiskids.blogspot.com/>

11. Support WCCF!

WCCF offers our e-materials and publications free of charge. We can't do it without your help. You can donate online:

<https://payments.auctionpay.com/ver3/?is=w043832>

Thanks for your support!