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Early Learning Matters – December 1, 2011

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Quote of the month:

“One of the great pieces of unfinished business is high-quality child care; I wonder why we just can’t do that.”

- *Rep. Nancy Pelosi, quoted in the Washington Post, November 17, 2011, about the need for a comprehensive child care policy for the nation.*

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1. Poll: 60 Percent in Wisconsin Think Early Childhood Education is a Good Economic Investment

An October 2011 poll by the conservative think tank, Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, found that 60% of Wisconsinites surveyed agree that early childhood education is an investment in Wisconsin’s economic future. Here are the results of question 29 in the poll:

29. Some people feel that state funding for early childhood education programs should be supported because it is an investment in Wisconsin’s economic future. Others feel that state funding for early childhood education programs is not a high priority when state budget dollars are scarce. Which comes closer to the way you feel?

Early childhood education is an investment in Wisconsin’s economic future.....60 %
Early childhood education is not a high priority when state funding is tight.....34 %

Don't know/Refused.....6 %

To see the entire poll, go to: <http://wpri.org/polls/Oct2011/Toplines.pdf>

This may be the only broad-based public opinion poll on this topic in Wisconsin.

The poll had 605 respondents with a 4% sampling error.

2. Offices of Early Learning Announced in Wisconsin and at the Federal Level

In almost simultaneous announcements, both the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the U.S. Department of Education indicated they are creating an Office of Early Learning. DPI Superintendent Tony Evers indicated in November that he will open an Office of Early Learning at the DPI to focus efforts and reforms in early learning to benefit students, in an e-newsletter: <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/DPI-ConnectEd/111128.html> The proposal to create the new office was also included in the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge application from Wisconsin in October.

In November U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan also announced the creation of an Office of Early Learning to oversee the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants and coordinate early learning programs across the Department. Dr. Jacqueline Jones will head the new Office. The results of the state competitive for Early Learning grants are expected to be announced by the end of the year. For more information on Secretary Duncan's announcement: [click here](#)

3. Federal Update: Super Committee Non-Action – What Does it Mean for Children and Families?

Policy wonks and budget analysts are trying to decipher what the effects will be from the lack of an agreement in the Super Committee, tasked with finding a bipartisan to address the nation's deficit. Here are some excerpts from some key national child advocacy sources:

National Women's Law Center: "No deal is better than a bad deal — and we were headed toward a bad deal. The fact that some members of the super-committee felt a strong enough obligation to protect the programs that women and families depend on is incredibly important... The automatic cuts that are scheduled would affect defense and non-defense programs equally. Unfortunately, discretionary programs that specifically serve low-income people are not exempt. However, the cuts won't start to take effect until 2013, so Congress has time make changes through the regular legislative process."

National Association for the Education of Young Children: "The automatic cuts (sequestration) do not start until January 2013. The good news is that some mandatory funded programs such as SNAP/Food Stamps, TANF, Social Security, Medicaid and the mandatory funded portion of child care are not subject to the automatic cuts. One strategy is to find ways to reduce the deficit between now and then that would allow less draconian cuts that could seriously impact children's early education, health and nutrition."

ZERO TO THREE: “Discretionary programs for low-income children and families are definitely not protected. Such programs as Head Start/Early Head Start, child care, early intervention, and Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) would be vulnerable to the cuts. While a Super Committee failure would trigger these automatic cuts, they would not take effect until 2013. This distant effective date may explain the lack of panic here in Washington, but it doesn’t eliminate the need for concern and vigilance by advocates for young children.”

4. WECA Releases Comprehensive Report on Child Care Workforce

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association has issued its newest research publication: *Child Care Professionals in 2010: The View From Wisconsin*. The report, written by Erin Gernetzke, provides a comprehensive look at the strengths, trends, and needs of the child care workforce. Some key findings on education qualifications:

- 67% of child care center directors have a two-year associate’s degree or higher, and 47% have a four-year bachelor’s degree or higher.
- 56% of child care center employees have an associate’s degree or higher, while 37% have a bachelors degree or higher
- 34% of family child care providers have an associate degree or higher, while 16% have a bachelor’s degree or higher

Education levels are notably higher than those reported in earlier workforce studies—the study showed a marked increase in college enrollment since 1999, when the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood ® Wisconsin began.

The study also found that wages for child care center employees have shown a slow rise since 1988, wages for center directors have decreased 7.6% since 2001, and family child care provides wages have risen 5.5% since 2001.

To see the report and its extensive findings, [click here](#)

5. Bill Would Expand Child Care Licensing to Some Private Schools

AB 215 and SB 179, related to child care licensing and private schools, are making their way through the legislative process. A bill that passed the Assembly Education Committee in mid-November, AB 215, requires public and parochial schools that provide care and supervision for children under three years of age to obtain a child care license, but with one exception: a private school which is accredited by an accrediting agency specified in statutes. Note: private school accreditation appears to have little relevance to infant and toddler health, safety and development.

To see the current version of the bill in the Assembly, go to:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/related/lcamendmemo/ab215.pdf>

6. In the News

Linda Smith, formerly Executive Director of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, has been appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Department Liaison for Early Childhood Development in the federal Administration of Children and Families under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Joan Lombardi is stepping down from that position, after decades of service in early childhood policies and programs, both in and out of government.

7. Reading Room

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), through their *Improving the Odds for Young Children* project, profiles each state's early childhood policies as they relate to health and nutrition, early care and education, and parenting and economic supports. To see Wisconsin's profile, [click here](#):

A study from the Center for Public Education examined the effect of combinations of pre-k and kindergarten on third-grade reading skills. The study found that students attending pre-k and half-day kindergarten are more likely to have higher reading skills by the third grade than those attending full-day kindergarten alone. For more information, [click here](#)

8. WCCF on Facebook

"Find us on Facebook" with a link to our facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Wisconsin-Council-on-Children-and-Families/141061865927340>

You can also follow us on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/wiskids>

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