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A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD ADVOCATES

For Immediate Release

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Ready on Not, Here They Come *New Report Outlines the Importance of Quality Early Learning.*

Madison – To succeed in school and life, young children need high quality early learning environments, characterized by stable and reliable relationships, according to a new report issued by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). *Ready or Not, Here they Come*, a report on early childhood and education in Wisconsin, is the third in a *WisKids Count* series released by WCCF this year. The report includes research on the effects of early care and learning environments on children and recommends several policy solutions for Wisconsin.

“The preschool years are a time of rapid growth of cognitive social, emotional, and physical skills,” said Charity Eleson, WCCF executive director. “The success of this development largely depends on the quality of the environment in which the child lives and learns.”

A child’s relationship with his or her parents, caregivers and others is the basis through which they experience the world. Early experiences, whether negative or positive, heavily influence development and either enhance or undermine the innate ability of children to gain a healthy foundation for lifelong thinking, learning and social interaction. Finding quality education and care for children can be limited by availability, public investment and most significantly by family income.

“Many children in Wisconsin do not have access to high quality early learning environments, but the research tells us that if they do, particularly at risk children, the return on investments in the early years of a child’s life are extremely high,” Eleson said.

The report includes information on recent research done through the Perry High/Scope study, which followed at-risk children who attended a high quality pre-school program. The most recent findings, which document outcomes for those individuals by the age of 40, showed that for every \$1 invested in a high quality pre-school, there was a \$17 return as a result of improved educational outcomes, improved employment rates, reduced incarceration rates and fewer treatment needs.

“Decisions about public investments in Wisconsin, as we face another tough biennial budget, ought to be driven by what we know is effective. We know that high quality early learning experiences are extremely effective at producing good results for our children,” Eleson said.

The WisKids Count Report: Working and Poor, Ready or Not, Here They Come is a project that examines timely national research and works to apply those national outcomes into Wisconsin information and programs to develop a comprehensive look at the policies and outcomes for Wisconsin's children. To view a copy of the report and supporting information, please go to http://www.wccf.org/pdf/Working_Poor_Early_Education.pdf.

Ready or Not, Here They Come Report: Quick Fact Sheet

- A child's relationship with his or her parents, caregivers and others forms the basis through which they experience the world.
- Child poverty is the most insidious barrier to quality environments faced by children. Research has found children from low-income families are less likely to have gained early literacy skills from their families and to have participated in quality preschool programs.
- Early learning programs actually improve the life outlook for a vast number of children. The return to society is more than \$17 for every dollar invested in a child's early care and education.
- Consistent with national studies, in Wisconsin 15 percent of childcare programs studied were either good or excellent, 11 percent were poor and possibly damaging to children while the remaining three quarters were somewhere in between.
- Wages for child care teachers have stagnated so low that many live below the poverty line. Turnover levels have remained high for the past two decades and are 40 percent annually.
- Many child care centers would like to improve the quality of care but they are struggling financially to provide a quality learning environment and keep good staff when they can only offer low pay and poor benefits.
- Current programs that emphasize employment do little to help parents simultaneously ensure their children receive safe, nurturing, and stimulating child care and education.
- One way to improve this gap is to weave public school funding for four-year-old kindergarten into existing early care and education settings through locally based collaborations.