



For Immediate Release
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Start Smart Milwaukee Report Released: *Giving Our Children Their Best Start*

Madison – High quality early education, according to a report released by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) today, can be one of Milwaukee’s most effective tools to improve education and socio-economic outcomes for young children living in poverty. However, the report finds several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure Milwaukee’s youngest at-risk children have access to high quality early education.

A Start Smart Milwaukee report, *Giving Milwaukee’s Children Their Best Start: A WisKids Report on Early Education*, examines conditions for children living in Milwaukee based on accepted indicators of child well being and specifically makes an examination of research that shows the value and elements of high quality early education. Focusing on the key elements of teacher qualifications, student teacher ratios, and parental involvement the report examines how these standards are addressed in Milwaukee’s early care and education system. Providers of early care and education examined in this report include private preschools and child care centers, home-based care, 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten that is provided through Milwaukee Public Schools and 4-year-old kindergarten provided through choice and charter schools.

“Many studies show the positive effects of high quality early education and care programs for low income children and the resulting return on public investments in early education,” said Charity Eleson, WCCF executive director. “However, simply offering early education for children is not enough to achieve the desired positive effect for children and taxpayers. Early education programs need to be of high quality, which means that, amongst other elements, they should have highly qualified teachers, small classes and effective ways to engage parents in their children’s education.”

Report findings include:

- Less than 3 percent of Milwaukee’s preschool, child care, and Head Start programs are accredited. Accreditation imposes more rigorous standards than state licensure or certification for teacher education, classroom sizes and parental involvement.
- Milwaukee Public School district’s policy for classroom size of 4-year-old kindergarten is 25 children to 1 teacher. State child care licensure standards for student-teacher ratios for 4-year-olds is 13 to 1 and national accreditation requires 10 to 1. Choice classrooms have no uniform standard for teacher-student ratios.
- Parental involvement in their child’s education has been shown to result in better educational outcomes. However, there are no state requirements for parental involvement that are consistently applied across licensed and certified child care, preschools and publicly funded 4-year-old kindergarten.

“Milwaukee’s early care and education programs are struggling with challenges similar to those of other communities around the state. The difference is the concentration of children living in poverty in Milwaukee is dangerously high. Vigilantly working to improve care and education for children must be achieved and needs to be a top priority for state and local policy makers,” Eelson said.

Recommendations of the report include:

- Creation of a public-private scholarship program for child care centers, home-based providers and preschools to expand accreditation opportunities. Helping with the costs of accreditation will make the goal possible for more providers.
- Require publicly funded 4-year-old kindergarten to have a student teacher ratio of 15 to 1 and to be eligible for SAGE funding. Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) funding is currently available to school districts that choose to lower class size in 5-year-old kindergarten through 3rd grade.
- Improving monitoring requirements for licensed and certified child care providers.
- Creation of a statewide quality rating system that provides parents with public information on the quality of childcare and preschool providers provides care providers with resources to improve quality and adjusts state payments to those providers based on the quality rating system.
- Improve tuition compensation and wages for child care providers through expansion of the existing state of Wisconsin T.E.A.C.H.® and R.E.W.A.R.D™ programs and improve access to affordable health insurance.

“Poverty should not have to be a life sentence for children,” said Eelson. “We know that high quality early education helps raise children out of poverty and gives them greater opportunities for success.”

The full report can be viewed online at: <http://wccf.org/pdf/startsmart2005.pdf>

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a statewide, non-partisan, non-profit organization that works to improve the lives of Wisconsin’s children and families. WCCF: Raising voices to make every kid count.

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