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Early Learning Coalition Urges Joint Finance to Approve Funding for YoungStar

The Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition has issued a position paper declaring its support for full funding of the YoungStar child care quality rating and improvement system proposed by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. The Coalition—a 14-member alliance of organizations promoting education and child well-being across the state—calls on members of the Joint Committee on Finance to approve sufficient funding for a full, statewide launch of the program. YoungStar would establish statewide quality standards for early care and education; provide incentives to providers for improving quality; and provide parents reliable information on which to base their decisions about where to enroll their young children. The Coalition’s brief position paper is available online at:

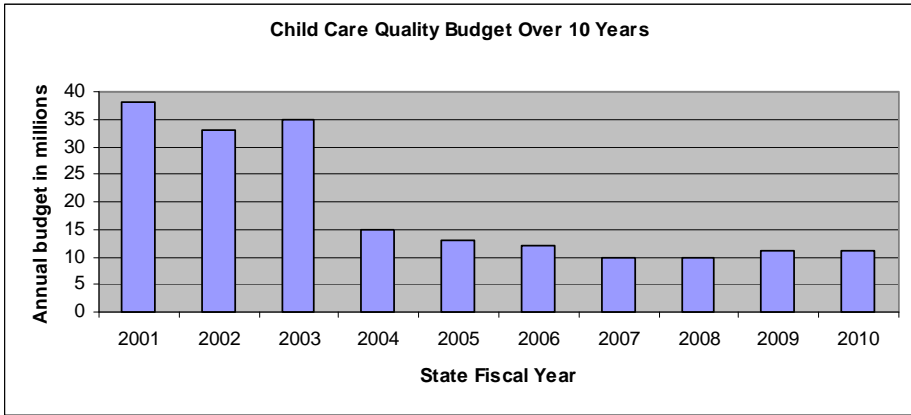
http://www.greatstartwi.org/pdf/young_star_elc_position_June2010.pdf.

The Coalition does NOT support beginning YoungStar as a limited pilot program. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems have already been studied extensively and their merits well documents. A pilot version of YoungStar would only serve to delay the benefits of the program from reaching many of the families who need them most.

Coalition members and other leaders in the field of early care and education have been working to develop and implement a quality rating and improvement system for Wisconsin since 2004. Such a system has been proposed several times, but never before has a comprehensive quality system for child care been this close to final approval.

“YoungStar makes sense for Wisconsin in so many ways,” said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, a member of the Early Learning Coalition. “It will help families make good decisions for enrolling their children; it will provide child care providers with the tools they need to improve their services; and, most important of all, it will help ensure that Wisconsin’s young children are having the best experiences possible while their parents are at work. Investing in quality early care yields enormous returns, both socially and financially.”

Taylor notes that the creation of the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program made Wisconsin a national leader in ensuring that working parents had access to affordable child care. However, spending on quality and oversight has shrunk significantly in recent years, and Wisconsin has fallen behind other states both in terms accountability and the quality of programming (see chart).



Note: A large percentage of the quality budgets for 2000-2003 was for quality grants to local communities that provided local match: \$26 million in 2000-01, \$25 million in 2001-02, and \$17 million for 2002-03.

Extensive research has demonstrated that spending on high-quality early learning programs is a sound investment, producing significant short- and long-term benefits, including school achievement, reduced need for special education, increased inclusion of children with disabilities, and lower crime rates, with particularly strong results for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. YoungStar is an important step in the right direction

According to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, Wisconsin Shares spending for the current biennium is expected to be \$104.5 million less than budgeted, due largely to the enforcement work of the Department of Children and Families, in partnership with law enforcement officials. Funding to start YoungStar would require only a fraction of that sum.

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