

Wisconsin Children's Agenda For Early Childhood Education & Care

2002-2003

The vision for this Children's Agenda is that all young children and families in Wisconsin who wish have access to a comprehensive system of high quality early childhood education and care. This comprehensive system is built through partnerships with families, communities, and state and local agencies. This Agenda focuses on children ages birth to eight and the programs that serve these children and their families including: child care, Birth to 3 early intervention, early childhood special education, public school early education, Head Start, Even Start Family Literacy, preventive health services, parent education, home visitation, and family resource centers. The spirit of this Agenda is to build upon the best of our present programs and services, encourage innovation, and embrace new approaches emerging from research and practice.

This Agenda has been created through an ongoing collaborative process that is facilitated by Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners and supported through the work of the National Governors' Association State Team to Enhance the Public and Political Will for Early Care and Education. This document began as a work plan for the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners. It has been refined through a variety of meetings and input gathering sessions, and now represents a summary of action plans developed by various stakeholder groups. The specific recommendations have been generated through input gathered from participants at the annual Strongest Link Conferences, follow up meetings, and review opportunities. The creators and endorsers of this document believe that implementation of its recommendations will make a difference in the lives of all young children and families in Wisconsin.

What would make a difference for young children and their families in Wisconsin?

Goal A. Effective Use of Resources:

Early childhood education and care in Wisconsin will be supported through a state system that coordinates programs, creates efficient use of resources, minimizes transitions and advocates for quality programs for young children and their families in a variety of settings (including homes, schools, and group programs).

Recommendation 1: Create a Children’s Cabinet that includes leadership from state government to guide policy that enhances early childhood education and care for children, strengthens families, and uses resources efficiently. Advisory groups representing the business community and the early childhood education and care community will provide input to the Cabinet.

Recommendation 2: Establish a community based planning system that is designed to: develop a seamless system of programs for all families and their children between birth and age eight, provide programs and services for children with disabilities in inclusive settings, meet the needs of low-income families, and involve the business community in supporting and promoting family friendly work environments.

Recommendation 3: Ensure effectiveness of the early childhood education and care system by developing and measuring agreed upon child outcomes using appropriate strategies for young children.

Recommendation 4: Develop policies that refinance the early education and care system with public and private partnerships that support local flexibility through blended funding.

Recommendation 5: Invest sufficient long-term resources to support the development, advancement and sustainability of the system. We must invest sufficient dollars on a long-term basis to achieve the positive impacts of high quality early education and care as demonstrated by research.

Recommendation 6: Increase public engagement in influencing the use of public resources to support comprehensive early learning and care services.

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Goal B. Quality and Access:

Wisconsin will increase access to high quality early childhood education and care for all families. High quality environments for children are built upon high quality environments for staff.

Recommendation 7: Recognize the importance of work force development, staff retention, and compensation as critical features of high quality programs.

Recommendation 8: Build on existing resources to create a comprehensive technical assistance system for early education and care programs that promotes ongoing quality improvement.

Recommendation 9: Maintain the existing system for monitoring and accountability, and build on it to create a set of common standards for the new system.

Recommendation 10: Promote and encourage parent education, partnerships, and involvement opportunities in all early childhood education and care programs.

Recommendation 11: Improve access and effective support for parents through expansion of family resource centers, resource and referral agencies, and home visitation programs that are strongly networked with the medical, Head Start, child care, and school communities.

Recommendation 12: Promote extended family leave with income supports that include employer incentives to allow for parent involvement in early education and care, family-friendly employer policies, and tax credits to businesses that demonstrate commitment to community service including parent and other adult involvement in early childhood programs.

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Goal C. Professional Development:

Those who work with young children are competent in early childhood education and care and apply appropriate principles of early learning and development.

Recommendation 13: Develop an articulated and competency-based system of professional development at the secondary, technical college, and university levels to ensure that all those who work with young children in all settings have the knowledge and skills to facilitate quality early learning experiences.

Recommendation 14: Establish a competency-based career ladder that provides a continuum of educational experiences from introductory to mastery level.

Recommendation 15: Develop a coordinated system of mentoring and career planning for those who work with young children, building on the Department of Public Instruction's teacher licensing redesign (PI34) and other initiatives through the Department of Workforce Development Office of Child Care, Head Start, etc.

Recommendation 16: Ensure that professional development for all those who work with young children incorporates competencies related to working with children with special needs and that all settings include adequate support for children and families with special needs.

Recommendation 17: Ensure that professional development for all those who work with young children and families incorporates competencies addressing diversity including, but not limited to, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic variations.