



What's Early Care and Education Got to Do With It?

Long before it's time to shop for a child's first backpack, pencil case and lunchbox, the experiences and relationships that form the basis of a child's success are taking shape. High-quality child care and preschool programs help reduce poverty by preparing kids for success in school and in life. Because the first five years of a child's life are so crucial to development, good early care and education programs help give children a great start. Affordable high-quality child care programs help low-income parents work to escape poverty and give their children the best chance for later success.

Vision 2020 supports these measures to improve access to and quality of early childhood experiences for poor children:

- Ensuring affordable access to child care, 4K and Head Start services.
- Creating a statewide quality improvement initiative.
- Improving the quality of child care for children served in the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program.

How Is Wisconsin Doing Right Now?

Wisconsin has been a national leader in early care and education, ranking high among the states in providing support for child care subsidies, pre-Kindergarten programs, Head Start and services to children with disabilities. However, a child's access to high quality education from birth through graduation is determined far too much by the wealth of the community he or she lives in. Currently, less than half (about 46%) of Wisconsin's 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in an early care or education program. While the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program, the SAGE program, and other state investments help to reduce this financial advantage for many children, Wisconsin needs a more systematic approach to giving all children a foundation for success, regardless of family income. Wisconsin Shares is at risk of being unable to serve all eligible families; the program has already lowered payments for childcare providers and raised co-payments for low-income families. Although 71% of children under six in Wisconsin have one or both parents in the workforce, parents' ability to afford programs with an educational component may determine whether children are prepared for school and, eventually, for the workforce and their communities.

What Can Wisconsin Do in the Future? Policy Recommendations to Move Us Forward

To help reach the Vision 2020 goal of ending poverty by the year 2020, Wisconsin needs to seize the opportunity to enhance early development by implementing the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Expand affordable access to high-quality early care and education services:** Wisconsin needs to maintain and expand the child care tuition assistance program, continue to expand 4K, and guarantee the availability of Head Start and Early Head Start for eligible families. These programs help children prepare for school and allow parents to increase earnings through employment. These important programs help lift families out of poverty and help prevent the passage of poverty from one generation to the next.
- 2. Develop a statewide quality improvement initiative:** Wisconsin does not have a systematic way to assess and improve the quality of its early care and education settings. Many states have quality improvement systems that provide incentives for programs to improve quality and provide extensive professional development opportunities. Such a system should focus first on children from disadvantaged backgrounds to make sure they are ready for school. Research demonstrates overwhelmingly that quality early education helps prevent poverty.
- 3. Reward higher quality in the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program:** Wisconsin needs to build fiscal incentives for child care providers to improve quality. Children served by the state's subsidy program, Wisconsin Shares, are from low-income families headed primarily by single parents (over 90 percent). These are precisely the children who need an extra boost in early learning to get ready for school. High-quality early care and education is the best investment to reduce the school achievement gap and to assure that this generation escapes poverty and becomes self-sufficient.

Take A Step Forward in Your Advocacy!

Take the pledge to be part of the Vision 2020 Campaign and get updates on early care and education and other poverty-related issues and how you can take action to make a difference. Sign the pledge card and get involved at: http://www.2020wi.org/pledge_card.html

Join the Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition's Action Network The Coalition is working statewide to ensure that all of Wisconsin's young children get a great start, with particular attention to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. To learn about the Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition, go to: www.readysetgrowwi.org

Sign up for information and advocacy alerts on early care & education issues, go to: <http://capwiz.com/wccf/mlm/verify/>

Learn more about early education by visiting: http://www.wccf.org/proj_education.php