

**Wisconsin's Children
and
Our Common Prosperity**
in search of a shared vision

a publication of the Celerate Children Foundation
by Mary Berryman Agard
April, 2009



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The Roots of Prosperity

Across the nation, and here in Wisconsin, our collective commitment to stewardship and shared prosperity is in ascendency. We live in an hour of deep national reflection as we seek ways to create a future of lasting opportunity. More and more, we understand that if our society is to prosper we must start by giving every child a solid beginning. We now know that the very architecture of the human brain is laid down in the first few years of life, and when that structure is strong and vital, children grow into solid citizens capable of giving back to the communities in which they live.

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Here in Wisconsin, there are early signs of increasing cross-sector participation in issues related to early childhood education and care. Spots of enlightened practice and leadership include; the School Readiness Philanthropy Group which has begun strengthening early childhood experience in Milwaukee County; the formation of the Early Learning Coalition, a statewide advocacy group; the 96 Wisconsin school districts that have established 4 year old kindergarten programs; the emergence of the Partnership for Wisconsin's Economic Success, a business, community, and philanthropic group supporting quality early childhood education; and two major public private/partnership funding models supporting early childhood education and family support programs, Milwaukee's Educare Center and Racine's Next Generation Now. The new Department of Children and Families is working to advance the quality of early childhood education in Wisconsin. And recently, Governor Doyle announced the creation of an Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care.

The Growing Interest in Early Childhood Education

Over the last two decades, we have learned a great deal about the architecture of the brain, the basic structure that allows it to function. We know that if babies and very young children do not have the right kinds of interactions during the first years of life, the brain cannot grow properly. And when the architecture of the brain is weakened, kids face disadvantages as they grow, increasing the risk that they will not be able to participate productively in society.

We know that if babies and very young children do not have the right kinds of interactions during the first years of life, the brain cannot grow properly. When the architecture of the brain is weakened, kids face disadvantages as they grow.

Brain architecture is the basis for every job the brain does. It controls how our children will gather, evaluate, and use information; how they acquire skills; their capacity for moral decision-making; and how they will interact with others throughout their lives. It is the framework within which our children's personalities, character, creativity, intellect, and productivity are forged.

Solid brain architecture helps children become strong parents, productive workers, and effective civic stewards. As members of society, they are less likely to require expensive special educational services, to become high school dropouts, to engage in crime, and to experience unplanned teen pregnancy. In short, they cost society less, in human and material terms, and contribute more. Investing in our very young children reaps high dividends. In a very real sense, squandering the early years of any child's life impoverishes us all.

Fortunately, we know what kinds of experiences support the development of solid brain architecture. We know that regular attention from caring adults is critically important. Each response a little one receives to gestures, cries, and giggles helps shape the very structure of the brain. We know that both the people and the environment surrounding very young children play a role in advancing or defeating the development of solid brain architecture.

We also know what specific kinds of experiences damage brain architecture. We know that exposure to frequent stressors such as hunger, fear, or adults under pressure causes the child's body to produce toxic chemicals. Those chemicals stop cells from growing and forming necessary connections, weakening the fundamental architecture of the brain.¹ Similarly, environmental neurotoxins can impede brain development.²

Now that we understand how early experiences influence the development of brain architecture, we have also begun to understand why investments in early childhood education and care provide such high returns. Children with solid brain architecture build better human relationships, learn better in school, and make better decisions as they grow.

In light of these new and important understandings of brain architecture, leaders from many sectors of society have begun to explore ways in which their actions advance or hinder early childhood brain development.

- Employers are examining their policies and community involvement, looking for ways to help. They are working to guarantee a high-quality future workforce to return America to leadership in the global economy;
- Parents are seeking information to help them make decisions that give their own children the best odds of living positive and productive lives;
- Educators are looking to high-quality early childhood education and care to level the playing field and increase the effectiveness of public education;

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More and more leaders from business, philanthropy, education, child welfare, and law enforcement are coming forward to advance early education and care. Elected officials and civil servants are joining the cause.

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- Child welfare professionals are realizing the role early childhood education and care programs can play in strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect;
- More and more, elected officials are championing investments in the very young as a strategy for both driving economic development and for reducing the social burdens associated with school failure, juvenile crime, and unplanned teen pregnancy, and
- Early childhood education and care is catching the eye of philanthropic leaders who see its potential to strengthen society overall by increasing the capacity of each and every citizen.

There are many reasons why support for high-quality early childhood education and care is becoming stronger, but it all comes down to this: a child with solid brain architecture grows up to be a solid part of the community, contributing to the common well-being and increasing our shared prosperity.

Defining Quality Early Childhood Education

High quality programs provide opportunities for young children to reach out into their ever expanding world, experiment with their rapidly advancing capacities, and explore material, intellectual and social relationships with skilled teachers shaping their daily learning experiences.

High quality early childhood education and care is built around an understanding of how brain architecture works, and what it takes for children to develop strong foundations.

Quality rests, more than anything else, in the way in which children and their teachers interact, so small class sizes and high adult-to-child ratios matter. Where children are known as individuals; have warm, stable relationships with well trained, committed teachers; and are given appropriate activities to stimulate their curiosity in a language-rich

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environment, their brains develop powerful, lifelong connections. And, since parents and family are central in every young child's life, high quality early childhood education integrates parents into programs and services, respecting and supporting their ability to lead their children forward.

There are, of course, basic parts of the physical environment that help make early childhood education spaces more engaging and productive for children. Spaces that are clean and bright with lots of play and learning equipment, that provide opportunity for large and small motor play, and both indoor and outdoor experiences are helpful underpinnings. Good nutrition counts. Well-managed administrative and student records help guide instruction and track each child's unique health and learning needs and status. Safety is a basic requirement, including the need for an environment free of neurotoxins. Still, these basics alone do not insure high quality early education and care. Like the beds and bandages in a hospital, these basics are important, but beds and bandages alone cannot guarantee the delivery of high quality of medical care.

Lastly, high quality early childhood education can only meet its promise to society when it is available to the children who need it most. Availability in turn includes location, sufficiency, cultural compatibility, and affordability. Extensive research proves that impoverished children stand to benefit the most from high quality early education and care. Furthermore, research here in Wisconsin has documented the fact that early childhood education and care programs serving high percentages of Wisconsin's low-income children may be least likely to employ highly educated staff and more likely to experience high staff turnover raising concerns about the quality of care the state is purchasing through its child care subsidy system, Wisconsin Shares.

If Wisconsin is to reap the benefits early childhood education can deliver, high quality programs must be accessible to all children, and especially those in greatest need.

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Documented Benefits

Children who participate in high quality early education and care programs contribute more to society as a whole. They do better in school, have more productive lives as workers, make more responsible reproductive decisions, and are more likely to abide by the law.

The benefits of investing in high quality early education and care are well documented by respected scientific research. Of particular value are several longitudinal studies of the graduates of particular high-quality programs including the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan; the Chicago Parent Child Centers; the Abecedarian Project in Chapel Hill, NC; and New York's Elmira Prenatal/Early Learning Project. While each of these studies was slightly different in focus, taken together their findings show that graduates grow into adults who contribute more to society as a whole. Specific gains documented included higher rates of high school graduation and general educational achievement, lower rates

of criminal activity, lower teen pregnancy rates, higher earnings with stronger workforce participation, and lower rates of special education enrollment.

Today, economists have begun examining the value of investments in high quality early childhood education and care. Nobel Prize-winning economist James J. Heckman, in working to identify the root causes of economic growth and job creation was surprised to find the trail leading to early childhood investments. Today, as director of the Economics Research Center at the University of Chicago, he concludes "...that investments in young children may be the best way to stimulate economic growth, and investments in young children's social and emotional development may be the most productive of these investments."⁴

Brain architecture influences critical worker attributes including motivation and self-control which predict eventual self-sufficiency.

Since brain architecture not only influences cognitive learning, but also emotional and social learning, it shapes critical worker attributes such as motivation and self-control. These aspects of human development reveal themselves to be powerful predictors of eventual self-sufficiency and contribution to society.

“The foundations of social competence that are developed in the first five years are linked to emotional well-being and affect a child’s later ability to functionally adapt in school and to form successful relationships throughout life. As a person develops into adulthood, these same social skills are essential for the formation of lasting friendships and intimate relationships, effective parenting, the ability to hold a job and work well with others, and for becoming a contributing member of society”⁵

Return on investment in early childhood education and care has been calculated differently by different researchers, but all have concluded the returns are extraordinary.⁶ Investing in early childhood education and care is a good deal. In fact, Heckman believes these investments are more effective than the variety of conventional policy tools used to foster economic development. And, just as investing in young children makes sense, failing to do so has consequences. Social interventions associated with special education, intermittent employment, criminal conduct, irresponsible reproductive choices, and social conflict, are costly and frequently less effective than desired. Turning our backs on Wisconsin’s youngest children is pennywise and pound foolish. Wisconsin’s social and economic prosperity relies, in great proportion, on our developing the individual, social, and political will to advance high quality early education and care.

Brain architecture also frames the ability to form friendships and intimate relationships, necessary underpinnings for effective parenting.

Investing in very young children is an effective economic development strategy while failing to invest has expensive consequences for us all.

Where Wisconsin Stands Today

There are certainly things our state is beginning to do right in the effort to advance high quality early childhood education and care. But many efforts are very new, and much work remains. Among the bright spots are

The Educare Center of Milwaukee, an early childhood education and family support program serving impoverished children, models program excellence and demonstrates what can be accomplished when private and state funds join federal Head Start dollars to do right by children. Educare Centers, which were initiated by Illinois' famed Ounce of Prevention Fund, are now being seeded across the country through a partnership with the Buffett Early Childhood Fund. These centers aspire to be both a physical center providing exceptional early education and care and a catalyst for change in program quality and public policies. Each center provides year-round, comprehensive, center-based developmental child care, education, and related family services. Educare is a research-based model that builds on what works. Its goal is to better prepare young children from low-income families for success in school by nurturing healthy social emotional development and language and pre-literacy skills.

The Educare Center of Milwaukee serves 150 low-income children ages birth to five years and is supported by a strong public-private partnership that includes the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and the State of Wisconsin. Now, Wisconsin has a concrete, rigorously evaluated model for what shared investment in high-quality care looks like, how it operates, and what it accomplishes for children.

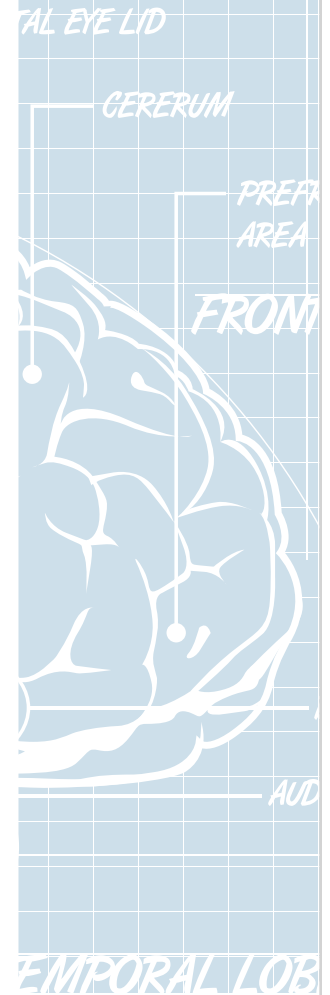
Wisconsin has miles to go in the work of creating an effective system of early education and care, but there are bright spots beginning to shine and ways for everyone to join the cause.

At the Educare Center of Milwaukee, highly skilled teachers are engaged in a continuous search for best practices, families are supported as valued partners, comprehensive services are provided, and children are challenged to grow. The facility itself reflects a standard of respect for children seldom seen in early education and care centers. As a part of a national network of Educare centers called the Bounce Learning Network, staff and board can call on information, experience, training, and support from peers across the nation. Outcomes are strong.

The Early Learning Coalition is a statewide advocacy coalition of groups concerned with giving Wisconsin's children a great start by providing them with access to high quality early learning experiences and nurturing care. Members include organizations working in early childhood education and care, healthy parents and families, disability rights and differently abled children, children's mental health, and public education. The coalition works to promote effective, cross-discipline public policies, for example, through their Great Start: Early Learning Matters campaign. Individual can and do join the Great Start campaign.

Milwaukee's **School Readiness Philanthropy Group** is a learning group of foundations and individual funders concerned with advancing early education and care. This group has played a strong role in highlighting the need for private investment in early education and care. In fact, members of that group have funded the work of which this document is a part and help sustain the Milwaukee Educare Center.

The Partnership for Wisconsin's Economic Success, a group of business and community leaders from Wisconsin, have begun advocating for high quality early education and care because of their interest in effective economic development strategies. The group maintains a website that gives access to research and opinion regarding early education and care. They have also produced an informational toolkit that gives voice to the economic development perspective, samples business efforts that support early education and care, and provides a look at what business leaders' involvement with the issue has achieved in other states.



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The Children's Trust Fund, Wisconsin's leadership agency with regard to child abuse and neglect prevention, has recently expanded its engagement with services for children and families, adding early education and care as a primary focus. This change, seeded by advances in research concerning brain architecture and the persuasive, very positive outcomes of programs blending early childhood education and care with support for fragile families, highlights the relationship between good early childhood programs and reductions in child maltreatment.

In order to create a flexible tool through which to advance public private partnerships, the Children's Trust Fund has created an allied foundation, the **Celebrate Children Foundation**. This foundation benefits from an endowment created by a special children's license plate available to Wisconsin vehicle registrants, and partners with businesses, individuals, and other foundations in projects that invest resources in quality early childhood and family development experiences.

Milwaukee's **Public Policy Forum** has become active in fostering public discussion of early education and care. It has published three documents exploring advances in Illinois and Minnesota, and promoted discussion of related issues.

Today, **one-third of Wisconsin's school districts**, including Milwaukee, offer 4-year-old kindergarten either through the schools themselves or through partnerships with independent early childhood education programs; another third are exploring options for delivering pre-K services to four-year olds. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's current positions call for recognition of the importance of early education and care; reduction in the fragmentation of Wisconsin's early childhood system; valuing early childhood teachers as comparable to other teachers; designing a comprehensive early childhood certification system; encouraging the participation of all major community stakeholders; allocation of incentives for prevention, partnerships, and foundation building; and valuing and supporting the needs of diverse families by building on extant service delivery systems.

In July of 2008, the state created a **Department of Children and Families**, focused on promoting the safety, economic and social

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well being of children and families. The department has five goals, one of which is “Families will have access to quality early care and education.” This goal is addressed by the Division of Early Care and Education, which has responsibilities for child care regulation and licensing, making data about licensed child care centers accessible, providing financial aid to families needing assistance in paying for care via the Wisconsin Shares program, statewide child care resource and referral services, and grants to promote quality child care. The Division collaborates closely with the Head Start State Collaboration Office. Bringing these functions together in one department holds the promise of advancing early childhood education and care quality initiatives. Today, the Department of Children and Families is focused on ending abuses within the Wisconsin Shares program and developing a policy and program base that advances high quality early education and care through quality ratings.

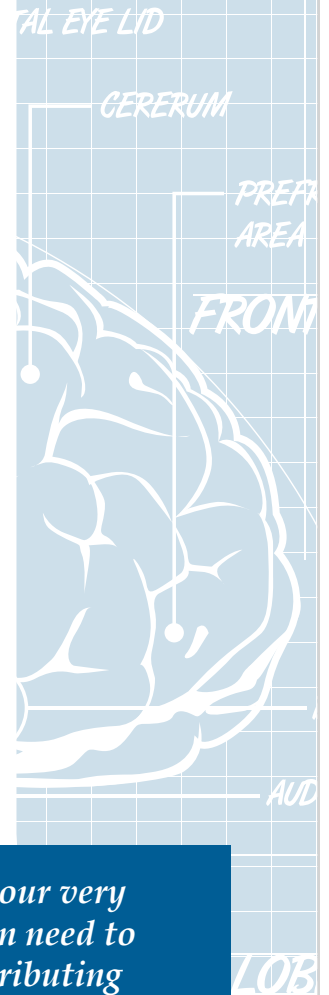
Additionally, a collaboration among the state departments serving young children, the state Head Start Collaboration Project and Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners has developed a set of Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards and a related training and professional development program. These tools are designed to help families and a wide range of professionals working with children 0-5 share a common language and common expectations in their work.


What Remains to be Done?

A great deal remains to be done. Our state early education and care resources are fragile. Early childhood educators are dramatically underpaid, often earning less than zookeepers. Standards for licensing and certification vary, and neither counties nor the state have adequate resources to insure regular compliance.

Many very young children, especially low-income children, languish in substandard care, their parents pressed by cost or lack of simple choice. Distribution of resources is uneven and our

We know what our very young children need to become strong, contributing citizens. The question is, do we have the wisdom and the will to demand the high quality early education and care system that will drive our shared prosperity?





While 85% of a child's core brain structure is formed by age three, less than 4% of public investments on education and development have occurred by that time.

subsidy system for low-income children remains wracked with fraud. Public dollars too often purchase low-quality care. Strategies for enhancing quality are many but consensus on the right approach is absent and resources are scant.

In 2004, the highly regarded national organizations Voices for America's Children and the Child and Family Policy Center conducted a study of state

investments in education by age of child titled "Early Learning Left Out." It revealed that in Wisconsin, only 0.92% of state's general revenue expenditure for education is invested in early learning. Seen another way, Wisconsin spent \$248 state and local dollars on the education of each child five and under compared to \$6639 for each school-aged (6-18) child. Overall, the report concluded "While 85% of a child's core brain structure is formed by age three, less than 4% of public investments on education and development have occurred by that time:"⁷ Clearly, given what we know about the rate of return on these investments, our public investment strategy is deeply flawed.

Progress will require bold public policies and creative private investments, committed philanthropists and stronger advocacy systems giving voice to the many sectors of society that depend, for prosperity, on our children.

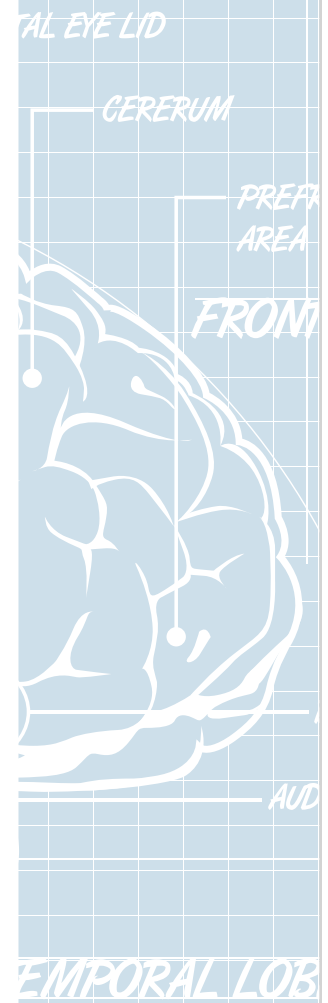
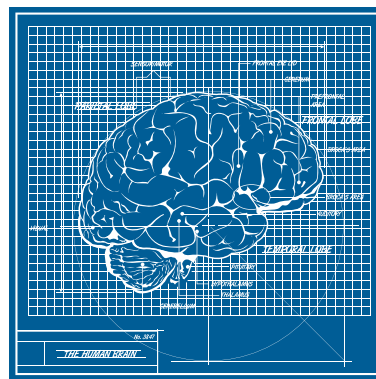
By looking at the experience of our neighboring states Illinois and Minnesota, we can learn important lessons. We need to develop a strong community of early education and care advocates whose voices reflect the variety of reasons for investing in young children. More business leaders must become knowledgeable about the relationship between early education and care and workforce and economic development. More players in the justice systems must come to understand and speak for the relationship between early education and care and lawful conduct.

We must strengthen engagement with, and the capacity of, coalitions with diverse policy agendas and foster their efforts to develop a shared early education and care policy agenda.

Finally, we must open the conversation to more voices and seek consensus around important directions for both public and private investment. That work must include identifying better systems of training, rewarding, and retaining early educators; stronger programs of public quality assurance; strategies for ending abuse in the Wisconsin Shares program; and making sure public dollars purchase only high quality early education and care. It must include ways of insuring access to high quality programs for all, especially our most impoverished children. It must create stronger vehicles for engaging parents in designing, selecting, and monitoring high quality education and care.

We must develop the capacity to fund and evaluate pilot programs, test new policies and ideas rigorously, then determine the wisdom of broader implementation. And, as we move forward, we must create systems of accountability. We must engage and support a variety of independent evaluators, economists, and policy analysts to help chart a course that is effective, fair, and returns the outcomes we seek.

These changes will not happen overnight. This work will stretch over years to come. It requires the development of greater capacity within our advocacy organizations, the thoughtful efforts of leadership in the public and private sectors, and incremental alignment of a widely supported public early education and care agenda with related political will. Hard and long work indeed, and yet, in this time of deep national concern for prosperity, we must certainly go forward. If our children are not our best hope, who is?



Things You Can Do

Information and action resources to help you get started are listed in the next section.

Parents

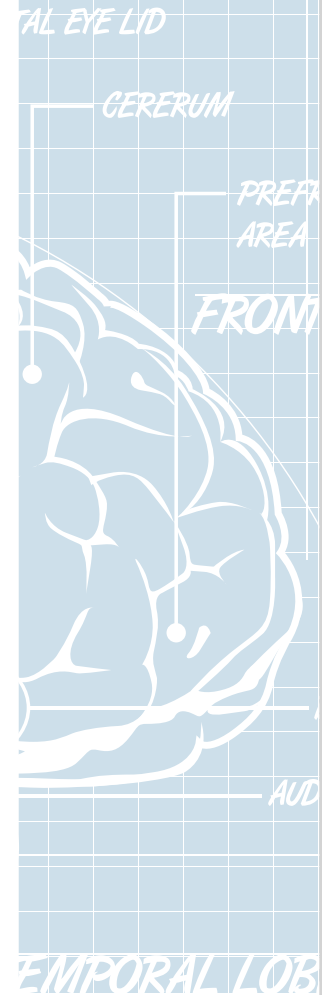
- Learn more about why early childhood education and care is so important to human development.
- Learn how to evaluate quality in selecting early education and care programs for your own children. Choose wisely.
- Be an active consumer. Support the early education and care programs that serve your children. Be vigilant and express any concerns frankly.
- Make sure your employer knows early childhood education and care is important to you and encourage the company to get involved.
- Be a voice for our youngest children. Talk or write about early childhood education and care with the candidates who want your vote at the city, county, state, and national levels.
- Connect the groups you are a part of to early childhood education and care issues. Talk to others at your place of worship, your school's PTO, your neighborhood center, and clubs.

Employers

- Help employees care for their very young children by adopting family friendly workplace policies.
- Encourage professional organizations of which your firm is a member to support early childhood education and care through volunteerism, endorsement, donations, and civic action.
- Advocate on the state level on behalf of public policies and investments that make high quality education and care available to Wisconsin's children.
- Appoint a senior representative of your firm to monitor the early education and care activities in your community and lend support where it is needed.
- Spread the word. Make sure your colleagues and peers understand the role of high quality education and care in workforce development.

Elected Officials

- Make sure every public investment in early childhood education and care supports efforts to raise quality, so that anticipated returns on those investments are high.
- Stand tall for early childhood teachers' right to fair compensation.
- Make sure the care public money buys for low-income children meets high-quality standards.
- Become a champion for sustained prosperity. Lead legislative efforts for very young children. Make sure public efforts to regulate, improve, and increase the supply of high quality early education and care programs are smart, effective, and have adequate resources.





Philanthropists

- Learn why other philanthropists are becoming engaged with early childhood education and care.
- Learn about the status of early childhood education and care in your giving area.
- Invest in strengthening the capacity of policy development, organizing, and advocacy organizations concerned with early childhood education and care.
- Work in partnership with other philanthropists in advancing early education and care; focus on quality enhancement by investing in broad system change efforts.
- Seek approaches that leverage public investment.

Information and Action Resources

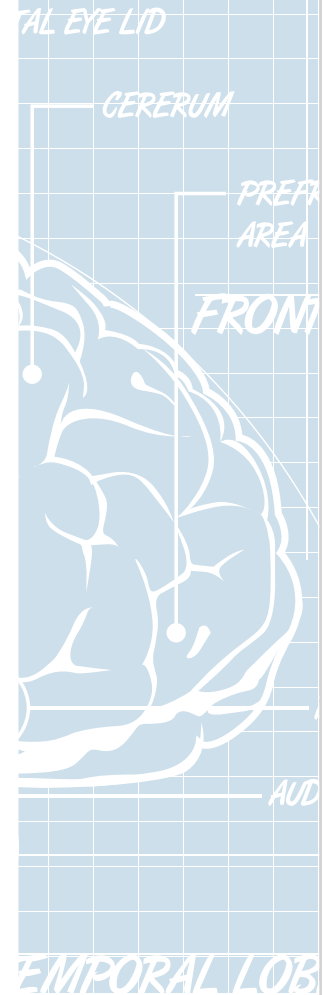
Local Information

4-C Community Coordinated Child Care
1850 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive
Milwaukee WI 53212-3639
414.562.2650
www.4c-milwaukee.org
4-C assists families in making wise early education and care decisions, works to enhance and support early education and care providers, and to strengthen families.

Public Policy Forum
633 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 406
Milwaukee WI 53203
414.276.8240
www.publicpolicyforum.org
The Public Policy Forum serves the public, business, government and other interested constituencies by spotlighting trends, defining emerging issues, and facilitating productive interaction among local governments and the private sector to promote sound and innovative policy solutions. Their work includes research and dialogue around early education and care.

Employers and Early Education and Care

Families and Work Institute
267 Fifth Ave., Floor 2
New York, NY 10016
212.465-2044
<http://familiesandwork.org>
The Families and Work Institute is a respected think tank whose purpose is to create research to live by. Their work focuses on the intersection of life on and off the job. In 2009, the Institute is launching a major early childhood initiative, and is already an excellent resource for family friendly workplace alternatives.





The Partnership for Wisconsin's Economic Success
www.wisbiz4kids.com

The Partnership for Wisconsin's Economic Success is a group of business and community leaders who have joined together to advance business community participation in advancing early education and care. Their website contains a fine group of resources to help business leaders learn what they can do to help, and why.

Advocacy Groups

Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition
555 W. Wisconsin Avenue Suite 200
Madison WI 53703
dedie@wccf.org
www.greatstart.org

The Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition includes organizations and individuals working across the state to make sure children have a Great Start. The coalition is guided by leaders from various professional fields related to very young children. The organization's public campaign is called the Great Start Early Learning Matters Campaign. Membership in the coalition is open to interested individuals and organizations.

Birth to Five Policy Alliance
info@birthtofivepolicy.org
<http://birthtofivepolicy.org>

The Birth to Five Policy Alliance is a national organization designed to promote innovative and successful policy ideas that support families in their parenting role and ensure positive early childhood development and learning opportunities for at-risk infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families. The Alliance is a pooled fund that supports research and policy analysis, offers outreach and support for state policy makers, and builds champions among key stakeholders. They provide a variety of clear and helpful ideas and free publications on their website.

Philanthropists

School Readiness Philanthropy Group of Milwaukee
c/o Linda Davis
Davis127@aol.com

The School Readiness Philanthropy Group is comprised of Wisconsin and national private funders and foundations as well as experts in the area of quality early childhood education and child care. The group is a learning collaborative. For more information, contact Linda Davis.

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The Celebrate Children Foundation is allied with the Children's Trust Fund and works to obtain and invest resources in quality childhood and family development experiences. The Foundation is the home of the project of which this publication is a part. The Foundation seeks interested partners in working to advance early childhood education and care.

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Endnotes

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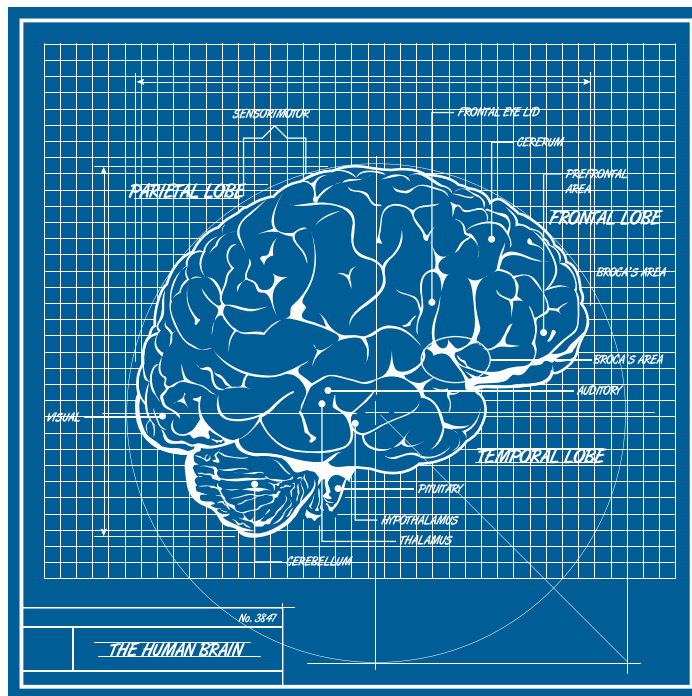
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