



*Executive Summary*  
**Wisconsin's Early Care and Education Landscape:  
Planning for a Coherent System**

## **Key Data and Trends in Wisconsin**

### **Census**

- **432,757** children ages birth through age 5
- **36.9** percent of children under age six live in low-income families (below 200% of poverty)
- **72%** of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce

### **Children in Wisconsin Early Care and Education (ECE) Settings**

- *Estimate:* Of children birth to 3 in ECE settings, **88%** are in child care programs, **9%** in the Birth to Three Intervention Program, and **3%** in Early Head Start are in child care programs.
- *Estimate:* Of children ages 3-5 in ECE settings, **59%** are in child care, **21%** in 4K, **10%** in Head Start, and **10%** in Early Childhood Special Education programs.
- The majority of children under age 6 in ECE settings are in child care- an estimated **61%**.

### **Growth of Children Served in ECE settings**

- *4-year-old Kindergarten:* enrollment has **doubled** since the 2002-03 school year
- *Child care:* enrollment in regulated care has **nearly tripled** since 1990
- *Wisconsin Shares child care:* participation has more than doubled since 1997
- *Head Start:* enrollment has grown **25%** since 2000
- *Early Head Start:* enrollment has **more than doubled** since 2000
- *Early Childhood Special Education:* enrollment has grown **10.5%** since 1997
- *Birth to 3 Intervention Program:* enrollment has **more than doubled** since 1992
- *Home visiting:* children and families served has been **growing steadily**, but statewide data is not available

### **The Size and Impact of Early Care and Education**

- There are now well over **10,000** ECE programs in Wisconsin.
- The economic impact of ECE programs now likely exceeds **\$2 billion** annually.

## **Key Findings: ECE in Wisconsin**

### ***ECE Landscape***

- ECE has a very diverse delivery system, with multiple funding sources and administrative agencies.
- Family needs have changed dramatically, with more parents working and more parents wanting child care and early education.
- ECE constitutes a large economic sector in Wisconsin.
- A significant portion of our children, particularly children of color, are at risk of poor outcomes.

### ***Access to ECE Services***

- A significant percentage of disadvantaged children are not accessing ECE services.
- 4K enrollment has more than doubled in 7 years.
- Child Care is the setting most used by parents for early care and education.
- Nearly two-thirds of Wisconsin children in ECE settings are in child care programs.
- Early Head Start and home visiting are emerging programs serving children birth to 3.

### ***ECE Quality***

- 4K and Services to Children with Disabilities have the highest teacher educational qualifications.
- Head Start and Early Head Start have perhaps the most comprehensive quality standards.
- Child care lags behind on most quality indicators, primarily due to a combination of lower standards and insufficient financing.
- Home visiting has developed excellent quality indicators, but they are not required for most home visiting programs.

### ***ECE System Models***

- Other states show that effective ECE systems are possible.
- The U.S. Military transformed its child care system with systematic standards for quality.

### ***ECE Infrastructure***

- ECE programs with **strong** infrastructure: 4K, Head Start/Early Head Start, services to children with disabilities (0-3 and 3-5)
- ECE programs with **weak** infrastructure: child care and home visiting