

February 19, 2010
1932 West Lawn Ave.
Madison, WI 53711

Senator Mark Miller, Co-Chair
Representative Mark Pocan, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 305 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Senator Miller and Representative Pocan,

On January 22, 2010, Secretary Reggie Bicha announced an exciting initiative of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families: YoungStar, Wisconsin's child care rating program. For many years, the child care community has worked toward the goal of a quality rating and improvement system for child care providers, and the goal is now within reach. In the next few weeks, Secretary Bicha will submit the final plans for YoungStar to the Joint Finance Committee for approval.

In its most recent meeting, the Early Childhood Care and Education Committee of the City of Madison voted unanimously to request that the Joint Committee on Finance approve the plan. It will benefit the children of the state, the child care community as a whole, and accredited providers in particular. Most especially, approval of YoungStar will signal that the State of Wisconsin understands the value of high quality early childhood care and education and is willing to support high quality.

Briefly, YoungStar proposes a five-star rating system for child care providers to go into effect in 2011. Programs will be assessed on quality indicators in four areas: 1) educational qualifications of teaching and administrative staff, 2) the learning environment and curriculum, 3) professional practices, and 4) the health and well-being of all the children served. Based on the number of points earned from the assessments, the providers will (or will not) be eligible to enroll children in Wisconsin Shares and may receive Wisconsin Shares payments ranging from the current levels to a 25% increment above current levels for the highest quality (5-star) care. On February 2, Secretary Bicha indicated that accredited providers, including those accredited by the City of Madison, will automatically be accorded 5-star status. He also indicated that the 25% increment for 5-star quality would apply to family child care providers and centers alike.

This higher reimbursement level will better support Madison Accredited providers who currently commit to quality childcare as reflected in their higher education levels, developmentally appropriate curriculum, supportive interactions and partnership with parents. It will better support providers who pursue accreditation through other means as well.

YoungStar deserves the full support of the Joint Committee on Finance. Increasing reimbursement levels based on quality gives providers an incentive to increase the quality of their care for all children, whether they are on Wisconsin Shares or not. Moreover, the increased support for high quality providers gives providers more financial stability and an incentive to offer quality care to those children who need it most, the kids whose parents have the lowest incomes. Tying quality assessment to Wisconsin Shares reimbursement will also help the State manage the problems of fraud and abuse that have crept into the Wisconsin Shares program.

We in the City of Madison also appreciate that YoungStar gives the State of Wisconsin an opportunity to follow the City of Madison's lead. Our Office of Child Care has promoted high quality for decades; it is in the City's and the State's best interest to see that work pay off for the benefit of all of Wisconsin's children.

Accordingly, we firmly endorse Joint Committee on Finance approval of the DCF YoungStar proposal.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely yours,

Joanne Brown, Chair

On behalf of the Early Childhood Care and Education Committee, City of Madison

cc: ECCEC members

Alan Sweet, Chair, Community Services Committee, City of Madison

Bill Clingan, Director, Community Development Division