

Creating an Early Childhood Comprehensive Plan for Madison

Background

In 2017, Madison applied and was accepted into the National League of Cities (NLC) Early Childhood Network to work to **align systems in early childhood** (<http://www.nlc.org/aligning-the-early-childhood-system>) with the support of NLC and other cities across the country. Early childhood is defined as **birth to age eight** in this context and encompasses many programs and resources that help families maintain stability such as child care, home visitation, parent education, parent crisis support, etc..

A core group of early childhood stakeholders, led by the City of Madison and United Way of Dane County, has learned that many other cities have a comprehensive plan for early childhood to guide collective action. Madison does not currently have such a plan and we have **identified the creation of a comprehensive plan for early childhood in Madison as the initial goal** of our participation in the NLC Early Childhood Alignment Network. **It is our intent that by assessing our current state and then planning for our future, we will better align services and programs to serve the families in our community.**

Step 1: Where are we now?

In January, we convened a group of 50 individuals representing organizations across the city to begin that process. We asked them a broad range of in-depth questions to gauge where we are in forming an early childhood system in Madison. We received a tremendous amount of good feedback from this group.

The next phase of our assessment is to gather input from families and front line staff in the field. We will gather this information through existing groups and United Way Community Impact Advisors Council. This phase will focus on three main questions for parents and caregivers and staff:

- 1) **What is your vision for early childhood in Madison?** Why is it important, what should be available or strengthened?
- 2) **What is done currently?**
- 3) **Where are the gaps?**
- 4) **What can be done to close the gaps?** If you had a magic wand what are the things you would do?

In addition to these activities, we are gathering input from the Imagine Madison comprehensive plan feedback and holding a listening session with family child care providers.

Step 2: Where do we want to go? What can those who provide feedback expect to see next? How will they know we have heard them?

After conducting the interviews and groups mentioned above, we will compile what we heard and then bring potential action steps back to the groups we met with to see if we

got it right. We'll make edits to the work and then draft a five-year plan for early childhood in Madison. The draft plan will be widely shared for input and feedback again before being finalized by the end of 2018.

Step 3: Put the plan into action.

The intention of the plan is to more comprehensively align child care and family services in Madison from both a programming and funding perspective. We hope to use the plan as a guide for community action around early childhood in lieu of siloed initiatives driven primarily by funding source.