

City of Madison Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan

Vision

All children have equitable access to opportunities to meet developmental milestones and succeed in school and life.

- *By all children, we mean especially children facing barriers to success.*
- *Access means equitable access to resources, programming and services at the time they are needed.*

Background and Gathering Input

In 2017, Madison applied and was accepted into National League of Cities (NLC) Early Childhood Network to improve early childhood services in the City. This partnership allows Madison access to collaborate with other cities' plans for early childhood and ensure that services align to best serve families in our community.

Through the NLC process, it was recognized that Madison does not have a formal plan for early childhood. The broad term "early childhood" is used throughout this plan to encompass many programs and terms that are used in this field which include, but are not limited to child care, preschool, early childhood education, pre-kindergarten, home visiting, parent education, play and learn groups, and others.

To begin the process of developing a Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan, the City and the United Way of Dane County, gathered approximately 50 "grasstops" leaders from community based organizations, elected officials, government staff, philanthropy and other early childhood stakeholders to assess the state of early child care and education in Madison. From this meeting came recommendations to do further outreach to families and service providers to complement the grasstops level feedback.

Over the course of a year (June 2018-July 2019), the City met with various community organizations and early childhood programs, and attended events to hear what families had to say about accessing early childhood programs and education. Staff from CDD conducted a Racial Equity Social Justice Equity Analysis of the feedback process to ensure we were collecting information in an equitable manner. Responses were gathered from over approximately 200 individual parents, grandparents, caregivers and staff. This information helped inform recommendations and identify priority areas, which allowed staff to begin drafting potential action steps to address the gaps identified.

The information was used to create this plan, which was reviewed and revised by the City of Madison Early Childhood Care and Education Committee in January 2020. Finally, the plan was taken back to the "grasstops" group of early childhood leaders in February 2020 for final review and revisions.

While many individuals suggested that providing publicly funded child care is the solution to many of these issues, others felt the price tag of this option was cost-prohibitive. Absent universal public funding for child care and other family services, this plan offers strategies to work within the existing systems, bringing in new partners and funding mechanisms to move Madison toward more equitable access to early childhood programs and services.

Timeline of Process

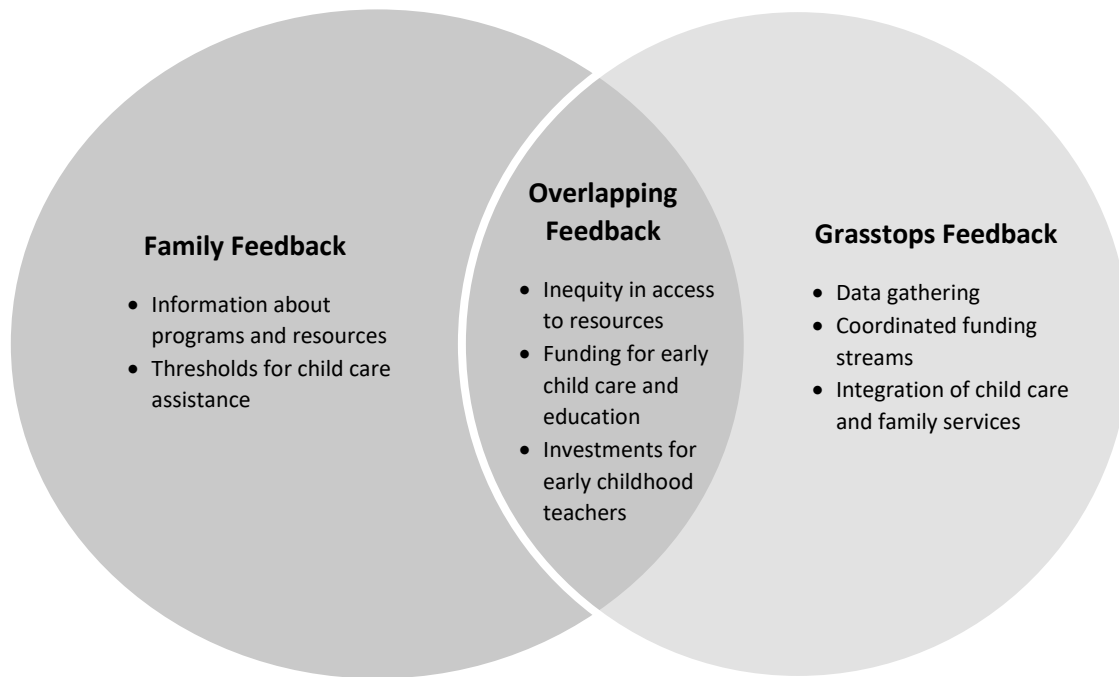
Aug 2017	Identify the current state of Madison early childhood care and education.
Jan-Aug 2018	Collect feedback from community leaders and develop draft themes and action steps.
June 2018-July 2019	Gather feedback from parents and service providers.
Aug-Dec 2019	Re-analyze themes and action steps. Create and revise a draft Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan for the City of Madison.
Jan-Mar 2020	Provide opportunity for final feedback and input on the draft Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan for the City of Madison. This is gathered through a series of formal and informal meetings with community groups and stakeholders.
Spring 2020	Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan for Madison is published.

Barriers and Needs Identified by the Community

Lack of up-to-date information about availability of early childhood programs and services was the biggest barrier to access early childhood programs and services that families and frontline staff identified. Specifically, families mentioned the need for more resources in Hmong and Spanish, ensuring information is in places that families can easily access, such as doctor's offices and schools, and creating a mass resource about child care and education programs in both printed and online formats. Additionally, many families wanted more information on how to engage with public officials, as only 38% of survey respondents thought elected representatives were dedicated to funding early childhood programs. Further, many parents mentioned that child care assistance limits and thresholds negatively impacted them and often prevented them from receiving support by just a few dollars.

Grasstops leaders identified the need for more data, especially looking at how data informs programs and services. Additionally, many respondents recommended coordinating funding streams to ensure organizations in the public and private sector were aligned to address the areas with the highest need. Many mentioned that although many groups were doing good work, oftentimes initiatives were disjointed and could be made stronger by more collaboration and coordination between organizations. Additionally, many identified the need for integration of child care and family services.

Families and grasstops leaders identified very similar areas of growth needed in early childhood in Madison. Inequity in access to resources was a common theme in both groups, mentioning income, race, neighborhood, and language as being very common barriers to accessing early childhood programs and services. Additionally, individuals mentioned the need to expand funding for early childhood programs and services overall. As wait lists grow and many centers experience staffing shortages, families and grasstops leaders both want increased public funding for early childhood. Lastly, due to many staffing shortages, the need for increased investments in the field of early childhood was a common theme. Professional development, increased wages and benefits, and recruitment and retention efforts were mentioned by both parents and grasstops leaders.



Recommendation 1: Connect Families with Resources through Public Information Sharing

Target: Community resources for children and families are well known, accessible, and easy to use.

Families are children’s first and most important teachers. When families are empowered and knowledgeable about early childhood resources in the community, the child is more likely to access quality programs. Once connected with a program, families are often referred to other useful community services and learn best practices to support their child(ren)’s development. However, many families said that getting connected to a program was difficult. This focused mainly around child care, but access to other programs such as home visiting, parent education, play and learn groups, and others were encompassed in this issue. Many families discussed the difficulty in accessing services because of the time commitment to research various centers on their own time. Additionally, families identified the need for a mass resource where they could learn about early childhood programs, community services for their children, and even developmental milestones.

YoungStar, a program out of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF), is a Quality Rating and Improvement System to evaluate the quality of child care programs in a consistent way. The YoungStar website already contains useful information on child care centers, children with special needs, and referrals to other resources. However, many people surveyed were not aware of YoungStar’s website or how to find resources or programs on it.

While effective resources exist, they are not well known in the Madison community. This may be creating barriers for families who want to access early childhood programs and services.

To address these barriers, existing, low cost options will be explored to share information with families. Using tools like social media platforms to connect families with early childhood centers and organizations that have openings for care or other programming could serve as an easy and sustainable way to facilitate the sharing of information. We will explore how this can be done in a linguistically diverse community. A workgroup will be

formed to co-create the social media presence with families to ensure it meets their needs for format and usability.

In 2020, Wisconsin was awarded a Preschool Development Grant from the federal government. Within that grant, Wisconsin proposed to conduct a “comprehensive and integrated communication plan that is accessible to all families and focused on the importance of high-quality ECE programs.” We will partner, when possible, with our state level colleagues to utilize the information and materials from this campaign to ensure maximum reach in the Madison market.

Funders in Madison will emphasize the need for services to be delivered in a manner that tells families there is “no wrong door.” Organizations will be encouraged to collaborate and refer families to other services within the community using a warm handoff rather than just a list of phone numbers for a family to call.

Additionally, service providers will coordinate engagement efforts with other existing events or gatherings. For example, opportunities such as The Week of the Young Child will be used as catalysts for action and information sharing with families because the increased media attention to the topic during this week will allow for earned media opportunities that do not normally exist.

Timeframe	Milestone	Partners/Who will complete milestone	Outcome
May 2020	Create workgroup to explore and create ways to share information		Workgroup is formed
June 2020	Workgroup conducts research and makes decisions regarding the social media launch		--
July-Aug 2020	Social media presence is launched and promoted by partners prior to school beginning		Social media is launched

Recommendation 2: Improve Access to High Quality Child Care

Target: Families have access to high quality, basic services that proactively promote and support health, learning and family strengths.

The City of Madison has many high quality child care centers, but families still tend to face long wait-times to get connected with these centers. Additionally, many centers are not affordable for families making it difficult to enroll low-income children into high quality centers. Although there are many programs to support families with centers they may not typically be able to afford, some families are ineligible due to their income, working status, or location. Therefore, it is a priority to continue to strive for affordable and high quality child care that is accessible for any family who many want to enroll.

In order to decrease wait-times to enroll children into child care programs, new programs may have to be created. However, as mentioned in Recommendation 3, there is an early childhood staffing crisis, where

current centers are struggling to fill openings and recruit new people into the field of early childhood, making it difficult to create new programs. We recognize that opening new centers may exacerbate the staffing crisis. In an effort to combat that, see Recommendation 3.

To improve the situation, Madison should continue to strive for more affordable and quality child care for children by providing incentives to start new child care programs. Additionally, Madison should continue to encourage lawmakers to fund early childhood so that more quality programs can be created. That funding should be sought to expand care to non-traditional hours (nights and weekends) and to provide care to reach historically marginalized families, especially families who are low-income, of color, and whose first language is not English.

This focus on marginalized populations will begin with an emphasis on providing care for children who are homeless or facing housing insecurity. The United Way and the City of Madison have recently provided generous funding to a local program that will largely cover the cost of providing care to dozens of children who are homeless or housing insecure each year in a model that has shown success in the past.

Partner agencies and community members such as landlords or employers can be utilized to connect more families to state and local child care subsidies through formal and informal means.

Timeframe	Milestone	Partners/Who will complete milestone	Outcome
2020-2022	Identify incentive package for child care start-ups	City of Madison WWBIC	More child care programs in Madison
2020-2022	Work with state and local partners to connect families to child care subsidies	City of Madison We Care for Dane Kids Business Partners State of Wisconsin Dane County	Increased uptake of Wisconsin Shares for Dane County
2020 and beyond	Seek out methods to expand access to child care for children who are homeless or housing insecure	City of Madison United Way of Dane County Early Childhood Homelessness Work Group	Expansion of care for homeless children

Recommendation 3: Support the Early Childhood Workforce

Target: Service providers access supports to ensure staff are well-supported, grow professionally and are retained within the workforce.

Currently, there is a staffing crisis in Madison in the field of early childhood. Centers have a difficult time recruiting qualified classroom teachers and qualified teachers are often underpaid compared to careers in other fields (Davis, 2018). Oftentimes, early childhood teachers are forced to leave their jobs for other

positions that pay more or offer benefits in order to make ends meet, resulting in low retention for many centers.

Lack of qualified child care staff prevents centers from growing to accept more families and new centers from being created, leading to a shortage in child care spots for children. Additionally, when there is little incentive for individuals to attain higher education in early childhood, this contributes to a lack of qualified staff for centers. Early childhood staff must be paid a living wage in order to retain service providers and incentivize people to join the field.

Further, many programs that work to serve the community are faced with teacher turnover rates that are high due to burnout of staff from working with children with challenging behaviors. Oftentimes, these teachers lack support from a qualified professional who could help them better meet the needs of the kids in their care.

To improve retention, there must be prioritization from the Madison community to both support existing early childhood staff and also to fund early childhood programs through more public funding sources. A group of local early childhood stakeholders have begun work on strategies to realize more public funding for children and youth. That work is interwoven with Wisconsin’s broader initiatives to address child care shortages for infants and toddlers at a policy and systems level.

To support existing child care staff, the City of Madison is hiring an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant to support programs in addressing the social emotional needs of children in accredited care. Ongoing professional development opportunities will continue to be prioritized by funders.

Further, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) and Reach Dane have launched a Shared Services Network, which brings together family, and group child care programs to pool resources and leverage economies of scale. This network of resources and expertise will work to address turnover, wages and benefits.

Additionally, a working group will be created to craft a plan for addressing wage and benefits issues for the workforce. Some of this work could be woven into our social media strategy by using our social media to elevate the early childhood field as a respected and viable career choice. Finally, work will be done with Madison College to promote the field of early childhood education in high schools and other non-traditional community locations so as to attract new interest in the profession. Techniques to make education more accessible, such as allowing individuals to create a portfolio for credit or online and hybrid pathways to education, will be utilized.

Timeframe	Milestone	Partners/Who will complete milestone	Outcome
June 2020	Hire Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant	City of Madison	Centers will be able to receive assistance to support their work with children with challenging behaviors.

Summer 2020	Working group on wages and benefits is formed	Advisory Group Members	Plan is created to address wage and benefit issues in the Madison early childhood workforce.
Dec 2021	A plan for addressing wages and benefits is developed by the working group	Working Group on Wages and Benefits	Action Plan Created
2020	Work with Madison College to develop approaches to recruit early childhood staff beginning in high school	Madison College and MMSD	More staff in the field of early childhood.

Recommendation 4: Coordinate Early Childhood Efforts

Target: Local early childhood leaders work together and across systems to coordinate efforts and review implementation of plan.

Many community organizations and leaders are dedicated to promoting early childhood programs and education. With a vast network of individuals and organizations focused on early childhood, it is crucial that these associations focus on the areas with the highest need. In order to do so, there must be a shared vision that recognizes the largest areas for the City of Madison to grow and common goals to address these areas.

There must be open lines of communication through a core group of community leaders and this group of people should be representative of the community. Within this group, organizations should work together to address common goals.

To date, many steps have been taken to begin to address this recommendation, such as through the creation of the NLC Advisory Group and the Dane Brain Collective, which brought the film No Small Matter to Madison in 2019. These groups, with several overlapping members, represent a large cross-section of the early childhood community.

To continue to address these issues, it is recommended that the NLC Advisory Group and the Dane Brain Collective merge, expand membership to bring in more local expertise through existing groups such as the Director’s Caucus, Birth to Three staff, home visitors, and Joining Forces for Families social workers and begin to meet two times per year to review the progress made on the Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan. The existing Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) early childhood advisory group will be a part of this structure. Additionally, the Plan should be updated periodically to ensure all recommendations are still priorities within the daily work of early childhood organizations.

Finally, there is a need to coordinate professional learning opportunities across and between sectors and agencies. To that end, members of the merged early childhood group will look for occasions to provide such learning opportunities.

Timeframe	Milestone	Partners/Who will complete milestone	Outcome
Spring 2020	NLC Advisory Group members reach out to Dane Brain Collective to suggest a merger and create parameters for the group	NLC Advisory Group Members Dane Brain Collective	Groups are merged
Summer 2020	New members sought	Merged Group Members (yet to be named)	Broader representation in the group from individuals beyond child care
Fall 2020 and two times per year thereafter	Merged group meets to review progress	Merged Group Members	Review and revisions of Comprehensive Early Childhood Plan

Recommendation 5: Inform Strategies with Data

Target: Local early childhood leaders use data to drive systems change.

Using data to drive decisions and best practices in early childhood is crucial for the City of Madison. Some agencies, programs, and departments have internal data that are used to drive decisions, but there are few common reporting mechanisms for the City of Madison. There is also a lack of capacity to analyze the data that is available. A standardized system for data reporting will only strengthen early childhood programs and services and give programs an opportunity to increase their quality that is backed by data. This will also allow us to concretely demonstrate our needs when applying for philanthropic, state or federal funding opportunities. To support this, we also recommend working with faculty from the University of Wisconsin-Madison to develop capacity within local organizations to analyze data to use it to its fullest potential.

Ultimately, a centralized way to longitudinally track children’s progress once they are in school is envisioned but not yet planned for. This would allow data from preschool to be linked to MMSD data to identify patterns of success or areas for improvement overall.

Timeframe	Milestone	Partners/Who will complete milestone	Outcome
December 2020	Create common metrics for agencies to report their information.	City of Madison United Way	Programs and agencies will be able to report and access data from around Madison to inform their strategies and initiatives.

Recommendation 6: Mobilize the Community

Target: Elected officials, businesses, and philanthropists prioritize support for early childhood.

As discussed in Recommendations 2 and 3, in order to increase the creation of early childhood programs and services, there must be an increase in public funding to support early childhood staff wages and the creation of new centers. In order to do so, elected officials must be dedicated to funding early childhood programs and services. In family surveys, only 38% strongly agreed or agreed that their elected representatives were dedicated to funding early childhood programs. Many families indicated that they did not know much about early childhood funding and they were unsure of how to engage with their elected official.

To ensure that all community members, including elected officials support early childhood, there must be a strong united front of people ready to advocate for more public funding for early childhood. This should include families, businesses and philanthropy.

One step to increase parental and community involvement with elected official is to more effectively utilize information and advocacy efforts that exist to help community members effectively engage with their representatives. In feedback sessions, many families indicated that they did not know where to start when engaging with their elected official. It is important that there are educational tools for families to learn how to advocate for their children. Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) provides some of these tools at the state level and will be invited to join this initiative. Members can adapt existing tools to create Madison-specific methods of engagement with elected officials. Additionally, elected officials could be provided with opportunities to meet with early childhood community members to create accessible opportunities for the Madison community to engage with their representatives.

Further, business interest should be leveraged to create an urgency for investment and action in early childhood funding. Connections to groups like the Chamber of Commerce or Downtown Madison, Inc. could be used to connect with businesses that are struggling to find employees due to the lack of affordable child care options. Businesses can lead by subsidizing child care at local or onsite child care facilities, providing child care stipends to employees, or contributing to a child care shared services network which offsets operating costs for child care programs across a large network of providers.

Finally, philanthropic partners should be encouraged to lead by example in the space of early childhood by funding in ways they have not before. This could be innovative ideas or simply prioritizing ways to offset costs for families who cannot afford both rent and child care in Madison. Philanthropists can subsidize the cost of care at local high quality programs, provide scholarship dollars for child care workers to attain education and professional development or contribute to capital campaigns for early childhood facilities.

Both businesses and philanthropy can also use their relationships and political influence to elevate early childhood as an issue of importance to elected officials and the general public. Recommend all discussion include a specific ask and action step in addition to education.

Timeframe	Milestone	Partners/Who will complete milestone	Outcome
2020	Madison-specific toolkit is created with sample emails, letters, and elevator pitches for community members to engage with public officials.	Wisconsin Early Childhood Association	Families will have access to resources to learn how to effectively communicate with their elected officials.
2020	Common Council, Dane County Supervisors and MMSD School Board Members are invited to an early childhood roundtable	Common Council, Dane County Supervisors and MMSD School Board and group members	Families will be able to meet with their local elected representatives to advocate for early childhood.
2020 and beyond	Create a working group to plan for business strategy in early childhood	Advisory Group Members	Ongoing work on business strategy is planned and carried out.
2020 and beyond	Create a working group to plan the philanthropic strategy in early childhood	United Way of Dane County	Ongoing work on philanthropic strategy is planned and carried out.

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References

Davis, J. (2018). *Wisconsin's child care worker shortage fueled by low wages, no benefits*. Wisconsin Public Radio.

Appendix A: Individual or Organizations with Input Into This Document

We would like to thank the individual and organizations listed below who provided support or input through in-person meetings, interviews, surveys or phone calls from January 2018-December 2019.

Amy Christianson, Reach Dane Satellite Family Child Care*	Ledell Zellers, Madison Common Council (formerly)
Andrea Riley, Community Coordinated Child Care*	Lee Elizabeth Hayes, Foundation for Madison Public Schools
Allied Drive Neighborhood Resource Team	Lillian Post, Catholic Multicultural Center
Bayview Community Center Staff	Linda Vakunta, Deputy Mayor
Boys and Girls Club of Greater Madison	Madison Metropolitan School District 4K Parents
Bridge Lakepoint Waunona Neighborhood Center	Madison Metropolitan School District Play N Learn Participants
Carrie Volenberg, Community Coordinated Child Care	Madison Metropolitan School District Staff*
Catholic Multicultural Center Parent Groups	Madison Public Library Staff*
Christie Howell-Yrios, Animal Crackers*	Maggie Pascaly, American Family Insurance
Cigdem Unal, UW Office of Campus Child Care and Family Resources	Marlo Mielke, Community Coordinated Child Care
City of Madison Community Development Division Staff*	Nan Brien*
Culleen Witthuhn, MMSD Director of Early Learning	Neighborhood Resource Team Leaders
Daithi Wolfe, Kids Forward	Paula Drew, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Dane County Human Services Staff	RISE Respite Center Staff
DANEnet	River Food Pantry
Denise DeMarb, Madison Common Council (formerly)	Ruth Schmidt, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Dipesh Navsaria, UW School of Medicine and Public Health	Sandra Bonnici, Madison Children's Museum
Donna Jost, Madison College	Sara Eskrich, Madison Common Council (formerly)
Donna Moreland, Madison Common Council	Sara Finesilver, Literacy Network
Early Care and Education Committee Members	Senay Goitom*
Falk Elementary School Parent Meeting	Sharyl Kato, The Rainbow Project
Gail Allen, UW School of Medicine and Public Health	Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, Madison Common Council
Gloria Reyes	Steven Skolaski, Oscar Rennebohm Foundation
Head Start Parent Council	Theresa Terrace Community Dinner Attendees
Heather Davis, Madison Children's Museum	Travis Wright, UW Madison
Jen Bailey, Reach Dane	United Way of Dane County
Jessica Cioci, Madison College*	Urban League of Greater Madison
Jill Wootton, The River Food Pantry	Vanessa McDowell, YWCA Madison
Karen Kapusta-Pofal, Madison Common Council Staff	Vera Court Neighborhood Center Staff
Katie Osterholz, Head Start Policy Council	YWCA of Madison
Kelly Hook, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association	Zachary Henak, Madison Common Council
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*Denotes current or former member of the advisory group