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CAVALIER JOHNSON
ALDERMAN, 2ND DISTRICT

Office of Early Childhood Initiatives moves forward

Statement by Alderman Cavalier ‘Chevy’ Johnson November 28, 2017

Today the Common Council took a critical step forward by endorsing the efforts of the Early Education Task Force that I co-chaired along with Danae Davis of Milwaukee Succeeds to create the Office of Early Childhood Initiatives. I am committed to building a better, stronger, and fairer Milwaukee and that effort starts with equitable access to early childhood education. The benefits of early childhood education are clear and the creation of this office shows an institutional commitment to our children and their future. While working on this initiative, I researched the investment made by government in positive interventions that encourage growth versus spending on law enforcement and corrections, and the results are staggering.

From 2009 to 2018, the state budgeted an average of \$7.9 million annually for early childhood education for a total investment of \$79.3 million across Wisconsin. During the same period, the Department of Corrections budgeted at \$1.25 billion annually for a total investment of \$12.5 billion. Told in another way, the State of Wisconsin invests 157 times more into locking people up than in making sure people get the best start in life, so that they never see the inside of a jail cell in the first place. Milwaukee County spends too few dollars on front end services. In 2016, the City Milwaukee spent \$1.7 million on CDBG funded youth engagement and preventive measures while simultaneously spending \$305 million, more than the entire property tax levy and then some, on the Milwaukee Police Department. In a time when criminal justice spending continues to increase, investing upfront in the school readiness of our children is common sense and prepares our youth for the bright futures ahead of them.

A major root cause of academic failure, inability to join the workforce and the military, plus crime, is lack of access to quality childhood education. Positively changing our communities and the lives of our residents starts with ensuring school readiness. The Office of Early Childhood Initiatives will decrease educational disparities and increase better academic outcomes. Our city’s youth deserve the tools and opportunity to achieve their full potential and become contributing members of society. The future of Milwaukee rests on the shoulders of well-educated and capable individuals.

In creating the Office of Early Childhood Initiatives, we commit ourselves to providing resources and opportunities for our children to succeed. I am excited to continue building strong families and strong communities by investing in this critical stage of youth development. All children deserve access to early childhood education and this office will help to ensure a bright future for our children.

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Early Education Task Force

Prepared by the Early Education Task Force Writing Subgroup,
on behalf of the Early Education Task Force

Recommendations

October 2017

WRITING TEAM MEMBERS

Dr. Wilma Bonaparte

Milwaukee Area Technical College

Tim Coughlin

Milwaukee Succeeds/United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

Danae Davis

Milwaukee Succeeds

Shyla Deacon

Milwaukee Public Schools

Dr. Vicki Martin

Milwaukee Area Technical College

Larry Miller

Milwaukee Public Schools

Dr. Tracey Sparrow

Next Door Milwaukee

Yolanda Tynes-Allison

Milwaukee Public Schools

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Ald. Cavalier Johnson, Co-Chair

City of Milwaukee

Danae Davis, Co-Chair

Milwaukee Succeeds

Bridget Clementi

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

Tim Coughlin

Milwaukee Succeeds/United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

Erin Cronn

City of Milwaukee

Shyla Deacon

Milwaukee Public Schools

Dr. Tito Izard

Milwaukee Health Services

Dr. Sheri Johnson

Medical College of Wisconsin

Paula Kiely

Milwaukee Public Library

Geri Lyday

Department of Health and Human Services – Milwaukee County

Dr. Vicki Martin

Milwaukee Area Technical College

Larry Miller

Milwaukee Public Schools

Gerard Randall

Milwaukee Education Partnership

Dr. Tracey Sparrow

Next Door Milwaukee

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research is clear. The first years of a child's life are critical for his or her development. In fact, we can affect the greatest impact on brain development prenatally and through the child's third year. Children who have a high-quality early childhood experience are more likely to do well in school and find better jobs as adults. They are also less likely to commit crimes or need public assistance later.

In Milwaukee, too many children are left behind before they even start kindergarten. This is strikingly clear when we see how few quality childcare resources are available particularly in Promise Zone neighborhoods. Without access to high-quality early education experiences and brain development practices utilized by parents, other family members and adults with our babies, an ever growing number of children come to kindergarten significantly behind their peers. The academic outcomes we see in Milwaukee start early and we know that with an investment in early childhood education these outcomes can improve.

Research quantifies the return on investment of early childhood expenditures as high as \$16 for every \$1 spent ("The Economic Power of Early Childhood Education in Wisconsin", The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, 2012). By investing in Milwaukee's youngest learners, our city will be stronger because of the enhanced likelihood of success of our children.

The City of Milwaukee's Common Council created an Early Education Task Force (EETF), comprised of a diverse cross-sector group of leaders and organizations to offer recommendations that will enable the City and its partners to create greater opportunities for access to quality early childhood education and experiences. The purpose is to build capacity among organizations and families and ultimately align practices and resources to support increasing the number of Milwaukee children who are ready to learn by kindergarten. The focus of these recommendations is in Promise Zone neighborhoods, zip codes 53204, 53206, 53210, 53215, 53218.

The EETF recommendations include "low hanging fruit" practices and tools such as making early brain development information available to families at hospitals upon birth, and through interactions with community partners including WIC clinics, churches, grocery stores, barber shops, hair/nail salons, etc. These information materials and resources would reflect the fact that many children in Milwaukee are dual language learners. The foundation for language development is set in utero as babies process and

store the sounds of the languages in their environment. The continued development of a child's home language in the family and early childhood program is an asset and will support the child's progress in all areas of learning. Focusing everyone in our City on "early talk" will lead to increased success for children. Early talk interventions support and facilitate healthy relationships which support brain development and provide a buffer against toxic stress. The less toxic stress, the more likely children are to be healthy adults.

Other short term solutions include increasing access to books and literacy materials and mobilization of resources such as VROOM, those offered through the Milwaukee Public Library and Books for Kids.

Because of the well-documented shortage of early childhood educators in the country and in Milwaukee, we focus on the need to build and sustain a diverse pipeline of quality early childhood educators, particularly African American and Latino males. Research shows that behavior challenges in preschool boys are reduced when they have a same race teacher, making it more likely that they will achieve academically.

Further, our recommendations address the need to sustain the commitment to increasing opportunity for early childhood education by the creation of a City of Milwaukee Office of Early Childhood Initiatives. This office's primary mission would be to sustain the implementation of the EETF recommendations and to build partnerships with County, State and Federal agencies to align practice and resources to support results.

Lastly, we include a recommendation that the City of Milwaukee pursue the ability to create a tax (excluding diapers and formula) to fund early childhood initiatives as has been done in an ever growing number of other states and communities, e.g., Cincinnati, Dayton, Philadelphia, San Antonio and Detroit.

It should be noted that though our recommendations are comprehensive, other strategic issues remain in need of attention long term. For example, compensation for early childhood educators and workers is woefully inadequate and must be addressed in order to truly build a pipeline of talented childcare staff and to reduce turnover among them.

We have included related artifacts, research, and best practice information as appendices to this report and invite all to read them as well for context and further support for these recommendations.

II. INTRODUCTION

Establishment and Purpose

On February 28, 2017, the City of Milwaukee Common Council unanimously adopted a resolution sponsored by Alderpersons Johnson, Hamilton, Zielinski, Rainey, Lewis, Murphy, Stamper, and Coggs, creating an Early Education Task Force (EETF). The purpose of the EETF is “to align Milwaukee Public Schools outreach and early education initiatives with City of Milwaukee Promise Zones, and to initiate a plan for birth-to-school literacy that will create more equity for children as they enter schools in Milwaukee”.

The resolution specified organizations to be represented on the Task Force and required that the work to recommendations be accomplished in no fewer than five meetings over a 6-month period of time. Co-chairs were designated Alderman Cavalier Johnson and Danae Davis of Milwaukee Succeeds, as well as 11 other members constituting a 13-member EETF with the first meeting of the Task Force being held on April 24, 2017. In addition to conducting the required meetings, the EETF visited three 4-star rated childcare centers: Next Door Headstart and Early Headstart Center on Capital Drive, Little Leaders Academy, a partnership example of the Milwaukee Public Library’s Ready to Read program located on Silver Spring Drive, and Gan Ami located at the Jewish Community Center in Whitefish Bay.

The EETF reviewed artifacts of local and national best practices and evidence-based research and literature on the subject of early brain development and quality child care, including a review of maps of available quality childcare centers (as defined by YoungStar system ratings of 4 or 5) in Promise Zone neighborhoods. From there, the EETF brainstormed strategies to be considered in the final recommendations.

What follows are recommendations for improving access to quality early childhood education that can serve as a blueprint of high quality services, prenatal through age 3 for children and families in the City of Milwaukee. These recommendations cover four key areas: improving quality early childhood education practice, access and support; strengthening and supporting a career path for early childhood educators, particularly among people of color; increasing community commitment to support parent education regarding brain development and the importance of developmental screenings of children birth to three years; and developing policy and providing support to early childhood education initiatives and policy change.

It should be noted that many important strategic issues were raised that need to also be addressed long term; for example low compensation for childcare workers. Though not included in this report's recommendations, the EETF believes this and other issues need to be addressed in order to attract and retain quality childcare workers and teachers. More than 50 percent of Wisconsin child care workers have an associate degree, yet the average hourly wage is \$10. Equity and fairness in compensation for the teachers and caregivers of our youngest children is necessary for stabilizing and growing childcare work ("Wisconsin Child Care Workforce: Wages, Benefits, Education and Turnover of the Professionals Working with Wisconsin's Youngest Children", Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, 2016). This issue combined with the significantly low rates of child care subsidy are concerns that must also be addressed, in order to significantly increase the availability of quality child care options for families in Milwaukee and the State of Wisconsin.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve quality childcare practice, access, and support.

- A. Improve quality practices in childcare centers across the city, with an initial focus on zip code areas of greatest need (53204, 53206, 53210, 53215, 53218).
 - i. Provide no-cost professional development opportunities to teachers and leaders in childcare centers and family childcare homes with fewer than three stars in the form of conferences, forums, and embedded professional development to increase knowledge in brain development, social emotional development, wellness, and effective literacy practices. Utilize Credit for Prior Learning as an opportunity for obtaining additional credits.
 - ii. Increase access to books and literacy materials in childcare centers and family childcare homes, mobilizing resources such as VROOM, the Milwaukee Public Library, and Books for Kids.

2. Strengthen and support a career path for early childhood educators, particularly among people of color.

- A. Implement the Leading Men Fellows program for promoting early childhood education as a model to increase the number of African American male teachers.
- B. Partner with educational institutions to employ new teachers within the field at select centers and within specified zip codes. Explore a stipend program which could be given upon completion of two years of service.

3. Increase community commitment to support parent education regarding brain development and the importance of developmental screenings of children from birth to three years.

- A. Initiate a targeted social marketing campaign to build community awareness and support of a “brain building strategy” focusing on strong relationships, developmental screening, adequate nutrition, exercise and sleep, and early talk. Information would be provided to families at hospitals upon birth, and through interactions with community partners including WIC Clinics and primary care clinics, churches, grocery stores, barber shops, hair/nail salons, community health workers, home visitors, etc.

4. Develop policy and provide support to early childhood education initiatives and programs.

- A. Dedicate funding to improve access to data for professionals, parents, and policy-makers, which includes developing service hubs of data to manage early childhood outcomes as a result of interacting with a variety of services, including, but not limited to, healthcare.

- B. Advocate for stronger investment in and increased funding for interventions for children with disabilities to ensure that quality services, education, and healthcare are available to all children in a timely manner. This should be done in collaboration with entities that are currently coordinating and offering these services.
- C. Establish a City of Milwaukee Office of Early Childhood Initiatives whose purpose is advancing and coordinating evidence-based early childhood efforts for children ages birth to three years, aligning existing and innovative services and initiatives for the benefit of caring for children holistically. This should be done in cooperation with and collaboration with the County and all other entities currently administering and offering these services. The role of this office would be to act as a coordinator of and collaborator with these several entities, rather than as director of these entities and to ensure that the community has information and access to entities offering these services.
- D. Lobby both State and Federal governments for a dedicated revenue stream to fund early childhood initiatives. Possible funding sources include, but are not limited to, public-private partnerships or dedicated tax by the City, County, State, or Federal.

IV. APPENDICES

Ready to Read 2017 Executive

Summary <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5353040&GUID=7E3F6862-048D-4EED-B2C1-836C20FA9A23>

EETF Subgroup

Minutes <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5331774&GUID=90C18F4D-FD6A-4718-987A-4949A132E772>

United Community Center Preschool (Bruce

Guadalupe) <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5327190&GUID=771338A3-6D9B-4384-8E32-0FF367161846>

Read Right From the

Start <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5187300&GUID=5E3BBF9D-E897-4EA9-A665-ACCE027F7FAE>

F. Heckman Health Training

Deck <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5130725&GUID=3D047B12-DCC0-482F-A07F-0970B9027812>

Milwaukee Community Solutions Action

Plan <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5132132&GUID=922E7BBC-76B8-40A4-9AAC-24533B80B33E>

Promise Zones

Handout <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5127851&GUID=67B71330-2890-45CA-8E63-896FE95B75A2>

Conceptualizing a Public Health Prevention Intervention for the 30 Million Word Gap -

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5104738&GUID=E3A82760-EBFC-419E-B5C8-DDFA6D8A5AB1>

Mitigating the Effects of Family Poverty on Child Development Through Parenting Interventions in Primary Care

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5104739&GUID=2B4F8AFA-BEB8-4C2A-B16C-036966CF82A9>

Next Door - Important Considerations for Early Childhood

Learning <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5104740&GUID=65AB9798-76DD-4AC8-A00E-E6241AE62575>

Leveraging the Biology of

Adversity <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5104794&GUID=2DA19CC5-0615-4827-856F-DBA6E43350A5>

Educare Results

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5105477&GUID=2A36CB2F-FF22-499A-A852-1FA793D2021F>

Corrected Literacy and the Impact of Conscious

Discipline <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5114526&GUID=9FA1F53A-8D6D-44BA-85C3-897E59091DE0>

Building a New Biodevelopmental

Framework <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5113725&GUID=7D173BE4-0943-4448-B1BE-00A8706AF237>

2016 Quality Jobs - Quality Child Care

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5113919&GUID=26B772D8-CBF1-47B9-ACFB-21AAC16B032D>

Literacy Pyramid

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5114612&GUID=1A25D020-9DA2-44EF-8C04-8F2A63FB80EF>

Ready to Read 2017 Executive

Summary <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5114613&GUID=D2AFAD19-1552-4C65-902E-BE048EC2AF3D>

Ready to Read Fact

Sheet <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5114614&GUID=2E81372D-ABFB-4240-97E4-BB7113456895>

High Five

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5114757&GUID=4DF82A89-EE93-44E7-8BC9-933EF95E32E9>

How Cities Embrace Their Infants and

Toddlers <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5150948&GUID=30C91CD0-DEF9-47DE-A98E-47C6A9CAFD00>

2016 YoungStar Validation Executive

Summary <https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5252918&GUID=869823BF-9726-4837-9771-F1CEF1AFEE41>

Rating Youngstar

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5253096&GUID=671E9E6A-9136-4FE1-9AF9-1E7D5ADFC6D>

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association's 2016 Report

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5447655&GUID=65EB2460-0523-4CD2-B50F-3CD22FD205B7>

Milwaukee Area Technical College – Early Education Childhood Program

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5447654&GUID=C784A741-C974-43F4-93E8-5912CE1E1D61>