



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development
Community Development Division
Office of Community Services

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Dear Community Member:

We are pleased to share with you the *2007 Listening Session Report* from Madison's Early Childhood Care and Education Board. During the last decade at least five forces have driven change in child care and early education programs on the national level; many are at work in our community. These include:

- An increase in the number of mothers in the workforce;
- The increasing demand for early childhood programs for working families and those seeking early educational experiences for their children. Sixty-one percent of children under age six in the United States are in some kind of care outside the home;
- Federal welfare program changes brought new requirements for low-income parents and child care funding;
- New brain research and the results of long-term studies of early education programs have contributed to the development of policy efforts to improve the quality of early childhood care and education programs in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for children;
- With the No Child Left Behind law, the early childhood field is considering how it relates to the K-12, and the potential to take advantage of early childhood education as a way to close gaps in achievement.

On the local level, the Early Childhood Care and Education Board wanted to examine the implications of these changes for programs and families in the City of Madison. In the fall of 2007 the Board invited community members to speak at a series of listening sessions regarding the current state of early childhood care and education in Madison. The enclosed report discusses several issues and trends facing children, families and caregivers, notes opportunities and makes recommendations for change. From the report we know:

- Quality early care and education positively affects children, parents and schools;
- Supporting early care and education professionals results in higher quality care and education for children, but funding levels are decreasing;
- Changes in WI Shares have resulted in low reimbursement rates in Madison, lack of continuity of care for children, and system failures that have destabilized families, employment and the child care infrastructure;
- Quality care and education has implications and opportunities for the business community.
- Changes in demographics in child care have produced a gap between supply and demand.

We all have an advocacy role to play in addressing our State's child care budget shortfall, educating parents and involving the private sector in early care and education initiatives. Additionally, policy makers, have a responsibility and moral obligation to familiarize themselves with and address key issues in early childhood care and education.

On behalf of the City of Madison Early Childhood Care and Education Board we invite you to read the enclosed *2007 Listening Session Report* and strongly encourage you to take action that supports stable, affordable, quality early care and education for our children and the infrastructure of early care and education.

If you have comments or questions about the report please contact Jolene Ibeling at 608-266-6542 or jibeling@cityofmadison.com

Sincerely,

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Jolene Ibeling
Child Care Program Coordinator

Joanne Brown, Chair
Early Childhood Care & Education Board