Executive Summary
Wisconsin’s Early Care and Education Landscape:
Planning for a Coherent System

Key Data and Trends in Wisconsin

Census

- 432,757 children ages birth through age 5
- 36.9 percent of children under age six live in low-income families (below 200% of poverty)
- 72% of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce

Children in Wisconsin Early Care and Education (ECE) Settings

- **Estimate**: Of children birth to 3 in ECE settings, 88% are in child care programs, 9% in the Birth to Three Intervention Program, and 3% in Early Head Start are in child care programs.
- **Estimate**: Of children ages 3-5 in ECE settings, 59% are in child care, 21% in 4K, 10% in Head Start, and 10% in Early Childhood Special Education programs.
- The majority of children under age 6 in ECE settings are in child care- an estimated 61%.

Growth of Children Served in ECE settings

- 4-year-old Kindergarten: enrollment has **doubled** since the 2002-03 school year
- Child care: enrollment in regulated care has **nearly tripled** since 1990
- Wisconsin Shares child care: participation has more than doubled since 1997
- Head Start: enrollment has grown **25%** since 2000
- Early Head Start: enrollment has **more than doubled** since 2000
- Early Childhood Special Education: enrollment has grown **10.5%** since 1997
- Birth to 3 Intervention Program: enrollment has **more than doubled** since 1992
- Home visiting: children and families served has been **growing steadily**, but statewide data is not available

The Size and Impact of Early Care and Education

- There are now well over 10,000 ECE programs in Wisconsin.
- The economic impact of ECE programs now likely exceeds **$2 billion** annually.
Key Findings: ECE in Wisconsin

ECE Landscape

- ECE has a very diverse delivery system, with multiple funding sources and administrative agencies.
- Family needs have changed dramatically, with more parents working and more parents wanting child care and early education.
- ECE constitutes a large economic sector in Wisconsin.
- A significant portion of our children, particularly children of color, are at risk of poor outcomes.

Access to ECE Services

- A significant percentage of disadvantaged children are not accessing ECE services.
- 4K enrollment has more than doubled in 7 years.
- Child Care is the setting most used by parents for early care and education.
- Nearly two-thirds of Wisconsin children in ECE settings are in child care programs.
- Early Head Start and home visiting are emerging programs serving children birth to 3.

ECE Quality

- 4K and Services to Children with Disabilities have the highest teacher educational qualifications.
- Head Start and Early Head Start have perhaps the most comprehensive quality standards.
- Child care lags behind on most quality indicators, primarily due to a combination of lower standards and insufficient financing.
- Home visiting has developed excellent quality indicators, but they are not required for most home visiting programs.

ECE System Models

- Other states show that effective ECE systems are possible.
- The U.S. Military transformed its child care system with systematic standards for quality.

ECE Infrastructure

- ECE programs with strong infrastructure: 4K, Head Start/Early Head Start, services to children with disabilities (0-3 and 3-5)
- ECE programs with weak infrastructure: child care and home visiting