



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY UPDATE

# EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

## A plan to transform early childhood care and education in our region

**Early childhood care and education is the key to giving every child the start in life they need and deserve.**

In the critical years between birth and age 3, 80% of a child's brain is developed<sup>1</sup> – meaning the opportunities and education they receive in these first years can shape the course of their life. What's more, early childhood care and education enables the parents of young children to participate in the workforce, providing a further benefit to both families and the greater community.

Yet half of all Milwaukee children under age 6 lack access to quality early childhood education, and Black and Latino children are disproportionately affected during this critical time of life.

Every child deserves the very best start in life, and there's no time to waste. That is why the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Milwaukee Succeeds are leading a generational investment in early childhood care and education.

# The Gaps in Early Childhood Care and Education

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation has long invested in education, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we commissioned a needs assessment to spotlight the gaps in our region's early childhood education system and inform a strategic, system-wide approach. Our assessment identified three major issues that must be addressed, and that have only been exacerbated since the pandemic:

- **Access:** Half of all Milwaukee children under age 6 lack access to quality early childhood education that meets the needs of their families and supports their future success.
- **Quality:** Less than half of providers are considered high-quality, as defined by a quality rating of 3, 4, or 5 stars from YoungStar, Wisconsin's childcare quality rating and improvement system.
- **Affordability:** A nationally determined standard specifies that no more than 7% of household income should be spent on early

childhood education, yet Milwaukee families not eligible for any type of federal or state subsidy spend an average of 19% of their household income on these services.

Behind these gaps is a broken market. While limited public funding supports the system, childcare is largely a private market funded by parent fees. The majority of families cannot afford quality care. Moreover, high-quality childcare is labor-intensive by nature, requiring low adult-to-child ratios. Because of this, even high per-child fees do not generate enough revenue to pay childcare professionals – many of whom are women of color – a fair wage with benefits. As a result, our region faces significant staffing shortages and regularly loses experienced, high-quality providers. This is why our region continues to suffer from a system that cannot offer every child and family an affordable, high-quality option. We need to change this dynamic at the local, city, and systemic level – and with your support and investment, we will.

## A Systemwide Strategy

To address these gaps and create an accessible, affordable, high-quality early childhood care and education system for all, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Milwaukee Succeeds – with the partnership and investment of donors like you – are pursuing two overarching strategies:

- 1. Increasing access to quality, affordable early childhood care and education for Milwaukee's Black and Brown families.**
- 2. Increasing recruitment, retention, compensation, and professionalization among Milwaukee's early childhood education workforce.**

**We invite you to join us as we advance these goals** through both direct investment in early education partners and through systems change work alongside the Milwaukee Early Childhood Education Coalition – a group of dozens of local experts, practitioners, and parents working to build a stronger early childhood sector for all.

# The Beginning of Change

During the Greater Together Campaign, donors and community members like you supported over \$2 million in high-impact investments in the early childhood care and education sector. This is over and above \$2.5M raised for the ThriveOn King Early Learning Center operated by Malaika, our hyperlocal investment. With additional donor support in our system-wide strategy, we can continue to make investments like those spotlighted below – and advance the change our communities need in early childhood care and education.

## Direct Investment: United Community Center’s Ricardo Diaz Early Learning Academy

One of over 20 organizations to receive direct support to date, the Ricardo Diaz Early Learning Academy was launched in 2021 out of an existing facility on Milwaukee’s south side. A \$100,000 grant supported facility renovations and improvements – expensive investments that often form a major barrier to increasing capacity.

Thanks to this investment, the UCC was able to increase much-needed seats for infants and toddlers and can now welcome over 300 children in 53215 – a zip code with limited high-quality early childhood education options – to a state-of-the-art facility.

## Direct Investment: Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP)

One of the best ways to improve access to quality early childhood education for Milwaukee’s Black and Brown families is to support the growth of providers already serving underserved communities. That’s why Milwaukee Succeeds and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation are investing in 4C for Children’s Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP), an initiative to support up to 45 providers in target ZIP codes to achieve national accreditation.

Through self-study, a quality improvement plan, a site visit, and more, this accreditation process ensures high-quality practices and leads to 4- and 5-star YoungStar ratings. Already, 26 programs – representing 512 high-quality early childhood education seats – are taking part.

## Systems Change: Strengthening the Early Education Workforce

With 50% of Milwaukee’s early childhood education programs reporting staffing shortages – resulting in closed classrooms, longer waitlists, and fewer children and families served – the Milwaukee Early Childhood Education Coalition, with leadership and funding from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Milwaukee Succeeds, is advancing critical policy change to support the early childhood education workforce.

Already, our efforts have resulted in a \$7 million city investment of federal funds to increase compensation and retention while strengthening workforce pipelines (with a focus on recruiting young men of color), as well as a \$5 million Workforce Innovation Grant from the state to recruit or upskill 105 early educators.

We are also working to make early childhood care and education policies work better for early educators and families, including the policies governing the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program for low-income working families.

“The MKE Early Childhood Education Coalition is a gamechanger for our early childhood care and education community. We’d been barking up the same trees for a very long time in this sector. To have a coalition that works together to be a catalyst for change – both to mitigate everyday issues and simultaneously work systems change and advocacy – and already have important successes that will help us continue our work.”

## TAMARA JOHNSON

Executive Director of Malaika Early Learning Center

## Immediate Funding Opportunity

For donors interested in supporting early childhood care and education throughout our community, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation offers this immediate funding opportunity:

- **Early Childhood Education Fund:**

Your gift can fuel the work of the MKE Early Childhood Education Coalition as we advocate for increased public investment, equity-advancing policy and systems change for all of Milwaukee and invest in early educators’ professional development. This fund also supports the expansion of existing high-quality centers to increase the quality of care and welcome more children.