
What's Happening In Wisconsin In Early Childhood Education and Care?

This chapter is a concise, handy reference of what Wisconsin is doing in child care, Head Start, public school early education, programs focused on children with disabilities, and other efforts to improve early education and care. The number of regulated providers in Wisconsin more than doubled in the 1990s from 4,413 to 10,500 licensed and certified providers. Of the 200,000 children in regulated child care, 21% received a child care subsidy from Wisconsin Shares in October 1991. The chapter overviews the Wisconsin legislature's investment in programs like Wisconsin Shares, supplemental Head Start, and SAGE as well as the number of children enrolled in 4-year old kindergarten, childhood special education, and Birth to 3 Programs.

This chapter on Wisconsin's publicly funded program for early childhood education and care focuses on five major program areas:

- ❖ **Child care programs:** including regulation, child care subsidies for low-income parents, and efforts to improve the quality and supply of services
- ❖ **Head Start:** a comprehensive program to serve children in poverty
- ❖ **Public school early education programs:** including 4-year-old kindergarten and SAGE programs for grades K–3
- ❖ **Programs focused on children with disabilities:** including special education programs in public schools for children 3–5 years old and the Birth to 3 program
- ❖ **Other early childhood care and education programs:** including an agreement between the technical college and the University system for early childhood training, the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners, and the National Governors Association's team to build public and political will for early child care and education.

These five areas are the primary focus of this chapter. Many other state and federally funded programs geared to young children are not included in this chapter including the Child Care Food Program, Even Start, Family Literacy, Healthy Start, programs for children with special health care needs, family resource centers, etc.

Child Care Programs

Wisconsin is regularly ranked among the top states for child care and child care regulation. For seven years in a row in the 1990's, Working Mother magazine ranked Wisconsin in the top 10 states for child care. In 1998, Good Housekeeping ranked Wisconsin among the top 6 states for infant care.

Child Care Regulation

Wisconsin has two primary types of child care regulation:

- ❖ Licensing, administered by the Department of Health and Family Services, and
- ❖ Certification, administered by the Department of Workforce Development.

Of those children in regulated child care, 21% were receiving a child care subsidy from the Wisconsin Shares Program in October 1991.

The number of regulated providers in Wisconsin more than doubled in the 1990s from 4,413 to 10,500 licensed and certified providers (over 5,300 licensed and 5,200 certified). Over 200,000 children can be served in regulated care (182,000 in licensed centers; 20,000 in certified care). Of the 200,000 estimated in regulated child care, 42,822 children, or 21% of those in regulated care, were receiving a child care subsidy from the Wisconsin Shares program in October 2001.

Licensing. Wisconsin laws require licensing of any program providing compensated care and supervision of 4 or more children under age 7 who are unrelated to the provider. A license is a permit to do business in the state. The Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) administers child care regulation and licensing through its regulatory bureau which has licensing staff in five regional and three district offices throughout the state. Wisconsin statutes require DHFS to establish rules which must be met in order to qualify for a license, and which protect and promote the health, safety, and welfare of children in a child care center. The department licenses and regulates child care facilities defined in Chapter 48 of state law and specific administrative rules. There are three categories of child care licenses:

- ❖ Group Day Care Centers serving 9 or more children (HFS 46)
- ❖ Family Day Care Centers serving 4-8 children (HFS 45)
- ❖ Day Camps (HFS 55)

Child care licensing rules address qualifications of staff (including training and background checks), child-staff ratios, supervision, group size, health and sanitation, indoor and outdoor space, health and sanitation, nutrition, building and fire safety, and the program of activities provided. Licensed programs are regularly inspected by regional licensing staff.

Child care licensing staff inspect, evaluate, and issue licenses to qualified new applicants, conduct ongoing monitoring visits, provide technical assistance, conduct license continuation reviews, investigate complaints of licensed and allegedly illegally operating providers, take enforcement actions against non-compliant facilities, and provide technical assistance, consultation, and information to providers and the public about child care regulations, best practices, and facilities.

- ❖ The number of child care centers licensed by the state has more than doubled in the past 13 years to a current level of 5,341 providers (2,342 group centers; 2,926 family day care programs; and 73 day camps).

- ❖ Wisconsin has seen a substantial increase in licensed child care capacity statewide. The estimated number of children who can be served in licensed child care centers has more than tripled from an estimated capacity of 62,307 children in 1988 to over 188,000 in 2001.

Certification. Wisconsin laws also require that child care services which are not required to be licensed, but which receive public reimbursement, must be certified for basic health and safety. Certification is intended to provide basic protections when public funds are involved in child care services. Certification is administered by county departments of human/social services.

Wisconsin Shares, the Child Care Subsidy Program

In the 2001–2003 biennial budget, legislators gave high priority to funding Wisconsin Shares, increasing the funding by \$218 million over the two years, a 60% increase over the base funding in the original 1999–2001 budget.

Purpose. The Child Care Subsidy Program, Wisconsin Shares, assists low-income families in paying for child care services. The program is administered by local Wisconsin Works (W-2) agencies and county or tribal human services agencies, which are supervised by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

Population served. Low-income families with working parents are generally eligible for child care help as are families participating in W-2. Teen parents in school from low-income families are generally eligible for assistance. Low-income parents who are working and enrolled in courses to maintain employment may also be eligible for assistance. Families must have incomes below 185% of poverty to be initially eligible, and can continue to be eligible until income exceeds 200% of poverty. Waiting lists for child care subsidies were eliminated in March 1997.

Parent Copayment. Most parents are required to share the cost of child care through a copayment. The copay amount is on a sliding scale based on family size and income and the type of child care setting selected. Typically parents pay about 10% of the cost of care, while the subsidy program covers about 90% of the cost. Copay levels are set so they do not exceed 12% of a family's income, but most parents have copay requirements well below that 12% level.

Child Care Provider Regulation. The subsidy program requires that child care providers must meet health and safety standards and undergo criminal background checks in order to receive reimbursement payments. Child care providers must be licensed by the state, certified by county or tribal government, or operated by a public school in order to be eligible for reimbursement. In 2000, over 7,700 child care providers received child care subsidy payments.

Reimbursement Rates. Reimbursement rates are set based on child care prices in local child care markets. Each county and tribe sets maximum reimbursement rates, based on annual surveys of licensed child care providers. Reimbursement rates are set so that 75% of the child care slots can be purchased at or below the maximum rate.

Licensed child care capacity in Wisconsin has more than tripled from an estimated 62,307 children in 1988 to over 188,000 children in 2001.

The number of children receiving child care subsidy help has nearly tripled since 1996, due primarily to W-2 funding.

Children and Families Served. In October 2001, 24,947 families and 42,822 children were receiving child care subsidy help. The number of children served has nearly tripled since 1996, due primarily to funding connected to Wisconsin's welfare reform initiative, Wisconsin Works (W-2). Of the families using the program, 92% are single-parent families.

Programs to Improve the Quality and Supply of Child Care

Wisconsin emphasizes the importance of quality early childhood experiences through the development and implementation of child care licensing rules and standards, provider training and technical assistance, and ongoing monitoring of child care programs. Wisconsin also addresses the quality and availability of child care through a major quality child care initiative, a statewide child care resource and referral network, start-up and expansion grants, and proactive licensing and monitoring. The federal Child Care and Development Fund supports the following activities:

Addressing quality in child care settings.

- ❖ **Early Childhood Excellence Initiative.** This initiative is intended to create state-of-the-art early childhood learning centers for children under age 5 from low-income families. The centers serve as model programs to emphasize innovative, high-quality programs that promote positive, holistic child development with an emphasis on intellectual and social development.
- ❖ **Technical Assistance for Early Childhood Programs.** Resources are available to help programs improve quality, including consultation and information for child care programs and consumer information. These programs include a statewide child care information center, a statewide network of technical assistance and consultation, and public information. State departments contract with the Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project to provide no-cost technical assistance to help child care programs become licensed and to establish quality services.

Training, mentoring and recognition for early childhood professionals.

- ❖ **Child Care Scholarship and Bonus Program.** Wisconsin's T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood Scholarship Program links training, compensation, and commitment to improving the quality of early childhood care and education experiences for young children and their families.
- ❖ **REWARD (Rewarding Education with Wages and Respect for Dedication).** This compensation initiative rewards workers in the child care and early education field who reach specified educational levels and stay in the field.

Child care grants to local government. Wisconsin provides grants to local government agencies that provide match dollars for child care purposes through this child care grant program. Typically grants have funded community initiatives in over 60 counties to improve the quality and supply of child care services.

Child care resource and referral (CCRR). Child care resource and referral agencies help parents find and select child care, develop new child care services where needed, support and help sustain existing child care services, identify local child care needs and resources, and provide public information about child care. Wisconsin has 17 resource and referral centers designated by the department to provide services throughout the state.

Head Start

Head Start was authorized under the federal Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to provide services for low-income preschool children and their families. Goals are accomplished through partnership with other organizations and agencies to provide health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services based on family interests. Head Start directly involves parents in their programs because parents are viewed as the primary educators of their children.

Since its inception, Head Start has served more than 19.4 million children. For fiscal year 2000, Head Start was federally funded at more than \$5.2 billion and served more than 857,000 children and their families nationwide. In Wisconsin, during the 1999–2000 program year, state and federal funding has given more than 15,377 children and their families the opportunity to be involved in Head Start. There are currently 54 Head Start agencies in Wisconsin, providing services to children in 70 counties.

Wisconsin provided supplemental state funds to complement federal funding for Head Start in 1991. Currently, the state commitment to supplement federal contributions has resulted in 1,388 additional children and families receiving Head Start services. In fiscal year 2000, Head Start Supplemental funds were 7.4 million dollars. These dollars are 50% TANF and 50% GPR and are administered by the Department of Public Instruction.

Federal funds for the Head Start program flow from the federal government directly to the local Head Start grantees.

Technical Assistance

Head Start programs in Wisconsin are supported by the Head Start Quality Network and the Quality Improvement Center for Disabilities. This training and technical assistance system is funded through a federal cooperative agreement with CESA 5. Staff works with individual agencies in developing plans to enhance and improve the quality of services delivered to participating children and families. There is strong emphasis in Head Start on including children with disabilities in programs.

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Public School Early Education Programs

5-Year-Old Kindergarten

In 1856 Watertown, Wisconsin, became the first community in the country to establish a kindergarten. As more school districts began providing kindergarten, the Wisconsin legislature required school districts to provide 5-year-old kindergarten in 1993. In the late 1990's kindergartens began to expand to offer full-day programs.

School districts are allowed to determine the length of the school day for those kindergarten pupils as long as standards for hours of direct pupil instruction are met. Pupils who attend half-day kindergarten programs are counted as one-half members in the general aid program. Pupils who attend full-school-day kindergarten programs are counted as full members in the general aid program.

During the 2000–2001 school year, 56,507 children attended public school 5-year-old-kindergarten. During this time, 241 school districts offered full-day 5-year-old kindergarten, 70 offered only part-day kindergarten, and 101 school districts offered parents an option of part or full-day kindergarten.

4-Year-Old Kindergarten

Wisconsin is a leading state in the provision of universally available 4-year-old kindergarten programs as public schools funding began for 4-year-old kindergarten programming in 1927. Of 426 school districts in the state, 133 (32%) currently offer a 4-year-old kindergarten program. They serve 12,743 children.

A large number of school districts across the state are exploring the LaCrosse community approach that offers 4-year-old kindergarten to every family in a variety of settings, including school, child care, and contracted child care centers. Parents electing to keep their child at home are afforded resources for in-home activities.

Teachers of 4- and 5-year-old kindergarten need to have an appropriate teaching license from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE)

SAGE aims to improve academic achievement, particularly for poor children. Participating schools/districts identify key academic standards in core subjects for each of the grades served in the program and report annually on the degree to which they have been achieved. A school district must have at least one school with a poverty rate of at least 50% before the district can participate in the program. About 48% of all the children served in 2000–01 are from low-income families. The program is required to

- ❖ reduce class sizes to 15:1 in grades K–3,
- ❖ keep the school building open beyond regular school hours for use by students or the community,
- ❖ implement a rigorous, high-expectations curriculum, and
- ❖ give attention to professional development and staff evaluation practices.

Almost one-third of school districts in Wisconsin offer a 4-year-old kindergarten program.

The program began in 1996–97 with 30 schools in 21 districts. From 1998–2000, 128 new schools in 25 districts were added. The 2000–2001 budget bill allowed 498 new schools to join. There were 12,433 pupils in SAGE grades during 1999–2000, and 61,400 are being served this year (2000–01). The original law provided up to \$2,000 per low income student in the grades covered by the program (K–1 in year 1, K–2 in year 2, K–3 in years 3, 4, and 5). Starting in 2000–01 the law requires that the payments equal \$2,000 of aid per pupil. The 2001–03 budget bill provided \$76 million for 2001–02 and \$95 million for 2002–03.

The DPI has contracted with the School of Education at UW-Milwaukee to conduct the required evaluation. Four years of data indicate that the program is having a positive effect on student achievement. The children in the SAGE schools have outscored the comparison group in all subjects tested. The results have been particularly promising for minority students.

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Programs Serving Children with Disabilities

Programs for Children Ages Three to Five Years With Exceptional Educational Needs

State law (Ch. 115, WI Stats.) requires each school board to ensure that appropriate special education programs and related services are available to children with exceptional educational needs who have attained the age of three years. School-district-based special education is in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B. School districts are mandated to locate, identify, and evaluate children from birth to age 21 who may be eligible for special education and related services. Each eligible child receives appropriate services in accordance with the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Federal IDEA funds provided about \$9 million dollars through the preschool grant and about \$81 million through the IDEA 3-21 grant. For purposes of computing state general school aids, a pupil enrolled in the special education program who is three years of age or older is counted as one-half pupil.

In the 2000–2001 school year, 14,383 children ages 3 through 5 were served in early childhood special education programs. The amount of time a 3- or 4-year-old spends in special education programs each day or week is not set by statute, but rather varies according to the needs of the child, as determined by the child's individualized education program.

The eligibility criteria, defined in the Administrative Code, includes the areas of autism; cognitive disabilities; deaf-blindness; significant behavioral disabilities; hearing impairment; specific learning disabilities; orthopedically-impaired; speech/language; traumatic brain injury; visual impairment; significant developmental delay (ages 3-5 only); or other health impairments.

Birth to 3 Program

Birth to 3 is Wisconsin's early intervention program for infants and toddlers, age birth to 36 months, with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. A federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides a framework for a comprehensive program and coordinates developmental, health, and

In 2000, a total of 8,371 Wisconsin children and their families were served by the Birth to 3 Program over the course of the year.

social services within the community. The Department of Health and Family Services oversees the Birth to 3 Program in Wisconsin and has developed rules that specify the program requirements. In 2000, the point-in-time child count was 4,369 children with a total of 8,371 children and their families being served over the course of the year.

Eligibility is based on a diagnosed disability or significant delay in one or more areas of development: cognitive; physical/motor; speech and language; social and emotional development; and adaptive. Services and supports a child and family receive are based on individual needs. Eligibility for this program is not affected by the family's income; however, parents may need to contribute to the costs of services.

The Birth to 3 Program will receive approximately \$6.2 million federal IDEA funding in the next fiscal year.

Other Early Childhood Care and Education Programs

Working to Improve Quality: Financial Incentives for Child Care Workers and the Development of a Comprehensive and Articulated Early Childhood Profession

Financial incentives for child care. Existing scholarship programs and financial incentives encourage child care staff to increase their education and remain in the field. A state/child care center agreement provides 10% of the tuition costs and a raise or a bonus at the time of completion of course work leading to an associate and/or bachelors degree. The Department of Workforce Development, Office of Child Care has received \$6 million annually in the state budget to operate a scholarship and bonus program under the auspices of T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood ® WISCONSIN. The program is designed to improve the quality of child care providers.

Career Resources: The Wisconsin Early Childhood Care and Education Career Guide. This guide describes careers working with young children, the programs, licensing requirements, pre-service training programs, technical assistance agencies, definitions of terms, state resources, and career planning (see www.collaboratingpartners.com).

Articulation between systems. The signing of an articulation agreement between the technical college and university systems allows technical college associate degree credits to transfer into university early childhood programs. The "2 plus 2" program will start by aligning course competencies for early childhood education. This agreement supports several other early childhood professional development trends:

- ❖ The move to competency-based teacher education programs and the new DPI teacher licensing redesign;
- ❖ The creation of dually-certified early childhood special education and early childhood general education degree programs at the university level;
- ❖ Recognition that technical college child development courses need to include competencies related to inclusive child care.

State Level Collaboration and Planning Efforts Supporting Community Partnerships

Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP). WECCP is a collaboration of three state agencies; Department of Workforce Development, Department of Public Instruction, and Department of Health and Family Services and approximately 30 state and local agencies and associations related to early childhood care and education. For an illustration of how Wisconsin's early childhood care and education is funded through these collaborative efforts, see Figure 1.

Building Public and Political Will for Early Child Care and Education.

Wisconsin was selected by the National Governors Association (NGA) to receive technical assistance. The NGA team consists of a policy analyst from the Governor's Office and members of major agencies and associations connected through Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners. Goals of this collaborative group include:

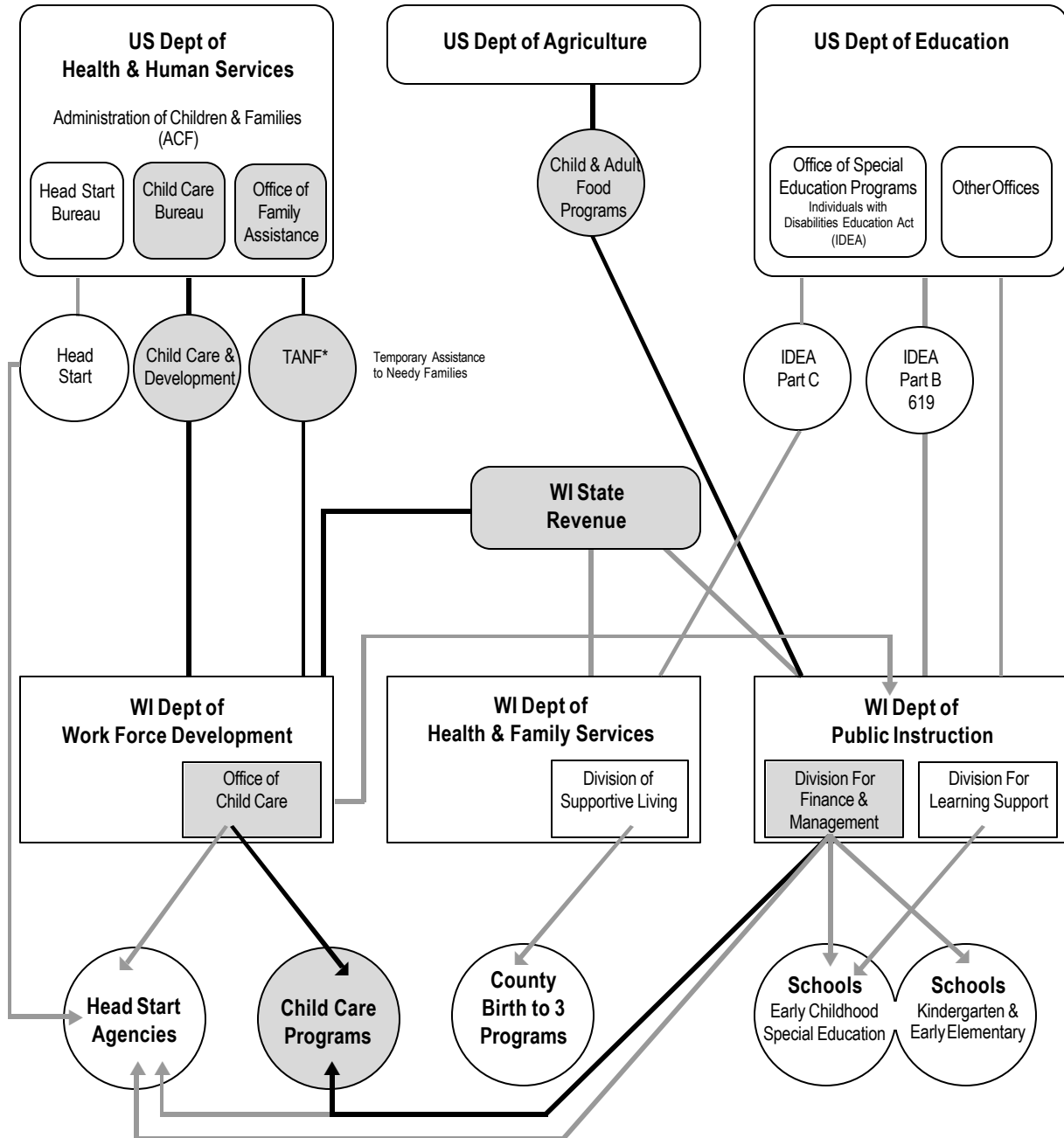
- ❖ **Statewide Collaboration for a Public Awareness Campaign.** A state and local collaboration launched a \$400,000 public awareness campaign titled, "Think Big, Start Small: Invest Early in a Child's Future." The campaign includes the use of TV/radio commercials, brochures, flyers, and billboards based on four important themes related to early childhood education and care.
- ❖ **Promote and Maximize Funding Sources.** The team is committed to look at current funding rather than the creation of new programs and funding streams. Major federal and state funding sources that directly impact services to young children were identified.
- ❖ **Blending Funding and Service Delivery.** The NGA team believes that services can be improved and funding maximized by blending service delivery at the community level. For example, school districts are encouraged to take community-wide approaches to 4-year-old kindergarten and to integrate special needs children into community programs. Head Start programs are encouraged to collaborate with child care programs to provide full-day and full-year services.
- ❖ **Childhood Brain Development Team.** The Departments of Health and Family Services, Workforce Development, and Public Instruction with representatives of the Governor's Office and the Technical Colleges formed a collaborative effort with the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families and Wisconsin Committee to Prevent Child Abuse to develop strategies to disseminate important scientific research on early childhood brain development. The goals are to educate people throughout the state about the research and its implications for early childhood development. This initiative has sponsored statewide training events for the past 3 years.

Head Start programs are encouraged to collaborate with child care programs to provide full-day and full-year services.

For further information on Wisconsin's publicly funded programs for early childhood education and care, contact the state agency representatives listed in the resource section at the end of this briefing report.

Figure 1

Wisconsin's Funding of Early Childhood Education and Care



*It is important to note that this chart does not account for the considerable amount of money expended through parent contributions or private pay. In Wisconsin, 48% of working families with children under age 13 pay an average of \$279 per month for child care. For these families, child care expenses consume on average 9% of family earnings, the second largest expense after rent or mortgage.

Source: Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (2001). *Working to Transform Early Childhood Education and Care*, p. 12. Madison, WI: Author. Available at: <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/docs/WECCPRReport.pdf>