



## **Wisconsin Child Care Providers Oppose SB595/AB 662, Which Would Create an Online Early Education Pilot Program**

Senate Bill 595/Assembly Bill 662, as amended, would appropriate \$500,000 in the current biennium for a three-year contract for an online early learning program for children who reside in Milwaukee, along with two other urban school districts and three rural school districts. The program would run from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023.

Utah-based Waterford Institute is advocating for SB 595/AB 662. Waterford is hoping to bring its Waterford UPSTART program into the state. In some of the other states where Waterford UPSTART has been piloted, state tax dollars were not needed.

The Milwaukee Child Care Alliance (MCCA) and the Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association (WCCAA) oppose SB 595/AB 662. MCCA and WCCAA have the following specific concerns and questions regarding the Waterford UPSTART program:

- The program appears to eliminate Social-Emotional supports that need to be developed in the earliest years. We know that if children have strong SE skills and can productively interact within a classroom, then the other skills/knowledge and abilities will follow.
- Back-and-forth interactions and experiential learning are how children learn best. How does this program incorporate these skills?
- The program encourages more screen time for children under the age of five. Research has demonstrated clearly that screen time should not be encouraged as an effective learning tool.
- It appears that the "coach" is the accountability person for the family. From our perspective, it would be more beneficial to work within the existing programs to add a parent coach for accountability and as an advocate/resource to strengthen the family engagement in learning within Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers, community parenting groups, school, etc. This would provide a more collaborative approach and also support existing early education programs.

It does not make sense for the state to spend tax dollars on an out-of-state initiative for early education when it is not fully supporting the programs that already exist in the state. MCCA and WCCAA members live, work, and raise our own kids here. We have a home-grown commitment and vested interest to improve the quality and early care of our youngest learners.

If legislators are looking for ways to make early education more available to low-income children considerations to support full funding for programs like the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program should be made. Other innovative new ways to support existing early education initiatives placing children first and central should also be considered.

As always, we welcome the opportunity to work with legislators to strengthen and improve early education in the state. We look forward to making sure all kids have access to the quality programs they will need to be successful in school and ultimately in life.