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Secretary Gassman Releases New Way to Measure, Improve Quality of Child Care, Early Education

State Labor Secretary Cites *Grow in Quality* Pilot Results at Green Bay Economic Summit

GREEN BAY – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today released a new practical, cost-effective method to measure the quality of early childhood education and encourage improvement, continuing Governor Doyle's *KidsFirst* agenda to promote quality child care.

"This is good news for parents because we have taken a major step toward a quality rating system that will help them make informed decisions about child care and early learning opportunities that are best for their children," Secretary Gassman. "What we have found also will help all providers – licensed centers as well as family care programs – take specific steps that can significantly improve the quality of their programs."

At a regional economic summit in Green Bay, Secretary Gassman reported on the results of a *Grow in Quality* pilot, a project DWD initiated two years ago to determine how to best measure and rate quality, and then evaluate steps to improve quality. DWD asked the UW-Extension Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership (WCCRP) and the Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project (WCCIP) to conduct the pilot.

"All children deserve quality child care, and we should promote quality programs that get children off to a good start and help us ensure a well educated workforce for the future," Secretary Gassman said. "Not only does this pilot show the value in having a quality rating system, it has given us the tools to measure quality and improve early learning. We all win when all children benefit from early learning opportunities."

The pilot involved 68 licensed group centers, randomly selected from four areas of the state: the Fox River Valley, Ladysmith, Madison, and Milwaukee. The researcher team observed their programs on three separate occasions. Following an initial visit, observers developed plans for improvement, then offered an average 10 hours of on-site consultation as technical assistance. Over the course of pilot, they refined their quality assessment tool and monitored program improvements. In their report to DWD, the project coordinators:

- Produced a new, practical, cost effective tool to measure and rate the quality of child care and early education, **Wisconsin MAP**, which stands for **M**aterials, **A**ge-appropriate, and **P**lan. The team used MAP to examine materials available to children, determine whether they are age-appropriate, and learn whether a center's lesson plan effectively aligns classroom materials with daily activities. In applying the MAP tool, observers also reviewed the center's professional and management practices.
- Confirmed the validity of four quality indicators identified by the Governor's 2004 Quality Counts for Quality Kids Task Force. Two of three programs in study had directors with a degree in early childhood education. More than half had teachers with at least six college credits in early learning. Both were indicators of quality programs. Applying the MAP tool, researchers further confirmed the importance of classroom environment and center professional practices as indicators of quality.

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- Demonstrated that technical assistance, based on the MAP tool assessment and targeted to meet a program's particular needs, can provide significant improvements in quality of care, classroom instruction, center environment, and professional practices.

The pilot report is available on the DWD web site at <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/>. Secretary Gassman encouraged all providers, licensed centers and family care programs, to draw on its findings as they work to provide children and families quality early care and education.