



Findings and Recommendations Report for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

A review of YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022



Wisconsin Department of
Children and Families

The WIDA Early Years Findings and Recommendations Report for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families: A review of YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022 was developed for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and was made possible by the Preschool Development Block Grant funding. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

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Overview of WIDA and WIDA Early Years

WIDA, an organization within the University of Wisconsin-Madison, works to advance academic language development and academic achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth through high-quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators. WIDA resources are used by 40 states, territories, and federal agencies, as well as over 500 international schools around the globe.

WIDA Early Years promotes equitable early care and education (ECE) opportunities for young multilingual children. It is a unique system of services and resources focused specifically on promoting multilingual children's language development. WIDA Early Years was established to support the growing number of children in ECE settings who are developing skills in two or more languages.

WIDA Early Years partners with state agencies to provide comprehensive services and access to resources for state leaders, higher education faculty, and ECE professionals who serve multilingual children and families. The WIDA Early Years Member State network includes Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, and Wisconsin.

Partnership Snapshot: WIDA Early Years and the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

In May 2020, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) partnered with WIDA Early Years. This partnership welcomed Wisconsin as a WIDA Early Years member state and was made possible by funds from Wisconsin's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5). DCF partnered with WIDA Early Years to address a need throughout the state for professional learning resources focused on supporting young multilingual children and their families. In its inaugural partnership year, DCF launched statewide access to WIDA Early Years eLearning, a series of self-paced online modules and webinars for ECE educators. Furthermore, the partnership granted statewide access to the WIDA Early Years Promising Practices Implementation Kit, a collection of tools for gathering data to inform practice and better support multilingual children and their families. This report is another partnership deliverable aimed at supporting the state's ECE workforce that serves young multilingual children and their families.

Introduction

Wisconsin has a rising population of young children who are growing up in homes where languages other than English are spoken. As this population increases, so too does the need for supporting the ECE workforce that serves these young **multilingual children** and their families. In Wisconsin, the number of households with parents who speak languages other than English and have young children ages birth to 8 years increased steadily between 2000 to 2011-2015 (Park et al., 2018). More specifically, the percentage of parents who speak languages other than English increased from roughly 43% in 2000 to 50% in 2011-2015 (Park et al., 2018).

The term **multilingual children** is used to refer to culturally and linguistically diverse children, ages birth to five years, who are learning two or more languages. Multilingual children are exposed to multiple languages in their homes, communities, and/or early care and education settings, and they develop and use language in dynamic ways. In the field, these children are commonly referred to as dual language learners, or DLLs.

The state's population of English learners (ELs) is mostly U.S.-born and concentrated in grades K-5 (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). ECE programs are likely to experience growing cultural and linguistic diversity among the children and families they serve due to the nation's shifting demographics among young multilingual children. "With diversity on the rise among DLLs [dual language learners] and the young child population more broadly, many communities are experiencing superdiversity in their classrooms with little to no guidance" (Park et al., 2018, p. 32). Today's diversity in ECE programs calls for changes to policy and practice in order to ensure the needs of young multilingual children and their families are met.

In Wisconsin, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to accelerating efforts around equity, quality, access, and workforce support to ensure all children have high-quality and equitable ECE opportunities. According to the state agency, the vision of the organization is that "all Wisconsin children and youth are safe and loved members of thriving families and communities. To reach our goal, we are focused on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in our programs and services" (DCF, 2020). Thus, a priority for the agency is to increase the number of ECE professionals who have training and education related to working with multilingual children and to enhance the quality of care for this specific, historically underserved population. To this end, DCF partnered with WIDA Early Years in 2020 to help address a need throughout the state for professional learning resources focused on supporting young multilingual children and their families. Furthermore, WIDA Early Years offered DCF technical assistance with support in examining state-level early childhood systems. The identified system that is studied in this report is *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022*. YoungStar is Wisconsin's child care Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Using an equity lens to examine YoungStar, WIDA Early Years reviewed the evaluation criteria for group child care to answer the following questions:

1. Which currently required practices in the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria align best with and/or support the needs of young multilingual children?
2. Are there additions, deletions, or modifications that should be made to the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria to better align it with early education best practices for multilingual children?

The subsequent sections of this report present a rationale for the review of the *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022*, the findings of the review, recommendations, conclusion, and appendix. We invite DCF staff and other key stakeholders invested in the success of Wisconsin’s young multilingual children and families to use the report as a tool for reflection on current YoungStar policy and practice, as well as a tool to guide enhancements to the criteria used for group child care.

Rationale

The languages and cultures that young multilingual children and their families bring to ECE communities are assets that contribute to all children’s learning and development as members of a diverse, global society. Multilingual children’s home language and English language development is shaped by their experiences and interactions as they navigate different contexts (e.g., home, community, ECE program/school); and as such, they develop and use language in dynamic ways which differ from those of their monolingual peers (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NAEM], 2017). Dynamic bilingual or multilingual language practices are valuable tools for communication and meaning making (e.g., García, 2009). Multilingual children draw from all of their linguistic resources to learn, communicate, form relationships, explore their environment, and play. Language is, after all, the most powerful tool we have for learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, bilingualism or multilingualism comes with many benefits. “The scientific consensus is that children who become fully proficient in both their home language and English are likely to reap benefits in cognitive, social, academic, and professional outcomes and to be protected from brain decline at older ages...This suggests we should view the development of DLLs through the powerful advantages of having more than one language. The assets associated with bilingualism and biliteracy have been well documented and should be recognized and supported” (Espinosa, 2020, p. 135).

In recent years, numerous position statements, reports, briefs, and research (e.g., Arreguín-Anderson et al., 2018; Children’s Equity Project & Bipartisan Policy Center, 2020; Figueras-Daniel, 2019; NAEYC, 2019, 2020; NAEM, 2017; Souto-Manning, et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016) serve to document multilingual children’s assets and highlight the critical need for changes in ECE policy and practice at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure that ECE programs are ready to provide high-quality care and early learning opportunities to multilingual children. However, despite what we know about the benefits of bilingualism in young children, and the value of children’s cultural and linguistic assets, the issue remains that multilingual children and their families continue to be at risk of being subjected to inequitable, deficit-oriented, and subtractive practice within ECE systems and programs (e.g., Barrueco et al., 2016; Children’s Equity Project & Bipartisan Policy Center, 2020; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Espinosa, 2020).

One step DCF can take to address this issue is to establish standards or criteria within YoungStar that explicitly call attention to the needs of multilingual children and their families. YoungStar is a five-star quality rating system for child care providers based on four elements of program quality: *Lead Staff Education, Learning Environment and Curriculum, Business and Professional Practices, and Health and Well-Being*. DCF is “committed to improving the quality of care for Wisconsin’s youngest children and YoungStar is helping to make it happen” (DCF, 2020). By participating in YoungStar, Wisconsin child care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement.

A report by the Foundation for Child Development also supports continuous improvement through the use of a QRIS, since it has “the potential to be a conduit for early learning, family support, and health and well-being to ensure that children of color, children from low-income households, and children from other marginalized communities have equitable opportunities to thrive and be successful” (2020, p. 77). Advocates for multilingual children and families call for states to establish a vision of quality services and QRIS design and implementation that embraces and responds to the needs of diverse communities (e.g., Barrueco et al., 2016; Sugarman & Park, 2017). For example, a recent report on equity for dual language and English learners recommends that states include QRIS measures—such as requirements for bilingual staff, practice for supporting children’s home language (i.e., instruction and assessment), professional learning for all program staff, and the implementation of bilingual program models in ECE programs (Children’s Equity Project & Bipartisan Policy Center, 2020).

In summary, speaking a language other than English should not hinder or prevent a young child’s opportunity to participate in high-quality ECE programs and engage in equitable early learning opportunities. Nor should it prevent the families of multilingual children from engaging in reciprocal relationships with ECE educators or from assuming the role of partner in their child’s early care and education. It is the responsibility of all ECE professionals to provide each child optimal learning and development opportunities by meeting children’s unique needs (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). Likewise, it is the responsibility of all ECE professionals to promote and advance equity to protect children’s rights to equitable learning opportunities (NAEYC, 2019). For multilingual children, this means that ECE professionals must have the knowledge, skills, and access to resources necessary to provide them high-quality early learning opportunities while supporting children’s home language and English language development. It also means ECE professionals must be ready to engage and partner with families of multilingual children to support children’s learning and development—including their home language and English language development. Thus, it is important to explicitly include QRIS standards, criteria, and/or indicators that promote equitable, culturally, and linguistically responsive practice for supporting multilingual children and their families.

Findings

Our review of the *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022* found that additions or modifications are needed to strengthen how YoungStar promotes equity and support for multilingual children and their families. In this section, we provide responses to the two questions guiding this review.

Question #1: Which currently required practices in the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria align best with and/or support the needs of young multilingual children?

As part of our review of the *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022*, we conducted a search of key terms most often used to describe or discuss multilingual children and families. Specifically, we searched for the following words:

"cultural"	"culture"	"culturally"	"diverse"	"diversity"
"DLLs"	"dual language learners"	"English learner"	"equity"	"limited English proficient"
"linguistically"	"non-English speakers"	"race"	"racial"	"racially"

We found that of these terms, the only ones used within the document are "cultural" (two instances), "diverse" (two instances), "diversity" (four instances), and "racial" (one instance). All nine instances of these terms are used within the *Family Engagement indicator of Element C: Business and Professional Practices*. In addition to that, a concurrent search for the other terms in this query returned zero results. Given that multilingual children and their families often come from culturally, linguistically, and/or racially diverse backgrounds, the explicit use of these terms within the *Family Engagement* indicator make it the indicator with practices that most align with and/or support the needs of young multilingual children and their families. However, despite the few instances of references to diversity, etc., the *Family Engagement* indicator and the practices therein can benefit from more explicit information about equity and practices for engaging with families as partners in their multilingual children’s learning and development—including language development.

Figure 1: Key Features of Family Engagement within YoungStar Family Engagement Indicator



The *Family Engagement* indicator offers a clear definition of family engagement, highlights Key Features of Family Engagement (see Figure 1), and offers various examples of each practice listed for the different items. Table 1 lists the practices within the *Family Engagement* indicator items that explicitly reference the terms “cultural,” “diverse,” “diversity,” and “racial.” These terms are shown below in **bold** font.¹

¹ One instance of “diverse” appears in the verification list for this indicator as “Materials for **diverse** family structures” and is not included in Table 1.

Table 1: References to diversity within the Family Engagement indicator items and example practices

<p>Item 2: Family Needs and Feedback Practice 3: Hiring practices of staff and volunteers reflect families' diverse backgrounds</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Program can demonstrate that there are racial, ethnic, and cultural similarities between program staff/ volunteers and the children/families enrolledb. Program uses positive images of diversity on its social media/website and diversity-related cues (e.g., equal opportunity employer statement, link to program's diversity policy) in job postings
<p>Item 3: Collaborative Activities with Families Practice 2: Opportunities exist for staff and families to learn from one another</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">e. Diversity is reflected in images and languages included on posters, signs, and other program materialsf. Frequent family participation in the program is encouraged. To ensure that all enrolled families are able to participate in some opportunities, they are flexibly scheduled in consideration of families' employment/education schedules, language preferences, cultural practices, and holiday and religious commitments.

As previously stated, more is required to truly address the needs of multilingual children and their families. Racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse families have historically faced various challenges when it comes to engaging with educators—such as deficit-oriented thinking, language barriers, bias, and/or discrimination (e.g., Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to draw attention to equity and diversity within family engagement indicators, items, and practices. However, family engagement is only one piece of the puzzle for meeting the needs of multilingual children. Explicit references and examples of practices that promote equity, as well as cultural and linguistic responsiveness, are needed throughout the system to better support multilingual children and their families.

Question #2: Are there additions, deletions, or modifications that should be made to the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria to better align it with early education best practices for multilingual children?

YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022 currently includes minimal, if any, explicit examples of practices for promoting equity and supporting multilingual children. Thus, there are numerous opportunities for enhancing the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria so that the system can indeed ensure that programs offer multilingual children high-quality ECE experiences.

As advocates for multilingual children, we must question understandings and/or definitions of “best practice(s)” given that many common notions of “best practice” are based on White, monolingual English-speaking children and families, and can therefore result in inequitable conditions or opportunities for multilingual children and families (e.g., NAEYC, 2019). The *WIDA Early Years Essential Actions* (WIDA, 2015) offers ECE educators fourteen research-informed guidelines for supporting multilingual children’s language development in ECE programs. The Essential Actions (see Figure 2) are a call for everyone—practitioners and teachers, families, administrators, and community members—to take action and collaborate in affirming the resources multilingual children and their families bring to ECE programs. In this first partnership year, DCF provided statewide access to the *WIDA Early Years Promising Practices Implementation Kit*, a resource that introduces the Essential Actions to ECE professionals and offers needs assessments to help guide professional learning around the Essential Actions. In Table 2 we offer a few examples of revisions that can be made to YoungStar components. The examples we present are informed by the Essential Actions and our experience in the field of language development. In the Recommendations section of this report, we further elaborate on steps that DCF can take to enhance the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria for Group Child Care.

Figure 2: WIDA Early Years Essential Actions

ACTION 1	Collaborate to ensure that all adults interacting with dual language learners support dual language development
ACTION 2	Gather information about dual language learners' cultures and the languages heard and used in the past and present in order to support dual language development
ACTION 3	Recognize and use the strengths, resources, and experiences of dual language learners and their families to support and enhance language development and learning
ACTION 4	Gather, analyze, and reflect on information in order to focus on the developmental nature and unique characteristics of dual language learning
ACTION 5	Apply information gathered about dual language learners: their cultures, how they use language, their language development, strengths, and resources
ACTION 6	Observe dual language learners' language use and development in a variety of routines and learning experiences throughout the day in all early care and education settings
ACTION 7	Connect language standards with early learning standards and guidelines to make curriculum accessible and meaningful for dual language learners
ACTION 8	Identify the developmentally appropriate academic language demands of routines, social interactions, and learning experiences
ACTION 9	Design language learning experiences with consideration for the sociocultural context
ACTION 10	Provide opportunities for all dual language learners to engage in higher level thinking
ACTION 11	Identify the purpose of the language used during routines and learning experiences
ACTION 12	Plan for language teaching and learning within specific areas of development and learning
ACTION 13	Use language supports to help scaffold language development and learning
ACTION 14	Provide multiple and meaningful opportunities for dual language learners to use their languages

Table 2: Examples of Revisions and/or Additions to YoungStar for Group Child Care

YoungStar Element/Indicator: Element B: Learning Environment and Curriculum	
YoungStar Example #1	Example Revision(s) and/or Additions #1
<p>Item 1: Staff members provide developmentally appropriate interactions and promote positive relationships</p> <p>All the following must be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff/staff and staff/child interactions must be positive or at least neutral • Staff and children demonstrate enjoyment in being with each other • Staff respond to children’s needs promptly and appropriately • Staff have developmentally appropriate expectations for children’s behavior 	<p>Item 1: Staff members provide developmentally appropriate, culturally, and linguistically responsive interactions and promote positive relationships</p> <p>All the following must be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions between staff and children must be respectful and considerate of culture and language • Staff and children demonstrate enjoyment in being with each other • Staff collaborate with others in the program to ensure that all adults interacting with multilingual children support children’s home language and English language development (e.g., see <i>WIDA Early Years Essential Action 1</i>) • Staff have developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate expectations for children’s behavior

YoungStar Element/Indicator: Element B: Learning Environment and Curriculum

YoungStar Example #2	Example Revision(s) and/or Additions #2
<p>Item 1: Staff members provide developmentally appropriate interactions and promote positive relationships</p> <p>At least two of these additional practices must be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are near children when promoting positive interactions and learning opportunities • Staff initiate language and literacy activities to support language development (e.g., storytelling, reading books, nursery rhymes, sign language, allowing children time to respond, expanding on children’s vocabulary) • Staff have turn-taking conversations with most children and ask follow-up questions with a pleasant tone of voice • Staff intentionally create opportunities for all children to engage in peer interaction in ways that are appropriate for each child • Staff provide children with descriptive feedback for their efforts or accomplishments (e.g., instead of simply saying “Good job,” staff are more descriptive by saying, “You picked up those blocks; that helps to keep our classroom safe”) 	<p>Item 1: Staff members provide developmentally appropriate as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate interactions and promote positive relationships</p> <p>All the following must be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff should provide multiple and meaningful opportunities for multilingual children to use their languages. (e.g., see <i>WIDA Early Years Essential Action 14</i>) • Staff should plan for language learning within specific areas of development and learning (e.g., see <i>WIDA Early Years Essential Action 12</i>) • Staff initiate language and literacy activities to support home language and second language development (e.g., storytelling, reading books, nursery rhymes, sign language, allowing children time to respond, expanding on children’s vocabulary) • Staff have turn-taking conversations with most children and ask follow-up questions with a pleasant tone of voice and by being linguistically responsive toward multilingual children • Staff intentionally create opportunities for all children to engage in peer interaction in ways that are appropriate for each child and culturally and linguistically responsive • Staff provide children with descriptive feedback for their efforts or accomplishments in both the home language and the second language (e.g., instead of simply saying “Good job,” staff are more descriptive by saying, “You picked up those blocks; that helps to keep our classroom safe” and by seeking ways to communicate the feedback in children’s home language) • Staff should design language learning experiences with consideration given to sociocultural context (e.g., see <i>WIDA Early Years Essential Action 9</i>)

Rationale for Example Revisions and/or Additions Provided: Children bring to ECE settings a vast array of experiences and knowledge that they have acquired in a diverse set of cultural contexts. They also bring cultural and linguistic assets that support them, which helps them learn and develop. When these assets are incorporated authentically and respectfully in the everyday ECE routines, experiences, and environments, they enrich the experiences of all children. Moreover, instructional practices and interactions should not only be developmentally appropriate, but also culturally and linguistically responsive. Furthermore, they must also promote equity. In the rows above, we offer examples where we explicitly include references to cultural and linguistic responsiveness and/or equity. We also show examples of how the WIDA Early Years Essential Actions can be integrated or used to inform revisions or additions to YoungStar.

YoungStar Element/Indicator: High-Quality Practice 3

YoungStar Example #3	Example Revision(s) and/or Additions #3
<p>All classrooms use an ongoing child assessment tool to assess individual children. The following are required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal assessment is completed for each child at least two times per year (or the frequency recommended for the tool) • The specific date each assessment was completed for each child is noted • The assessment tool must include the use of a developmental continuum (showing the progression of development from birth to five or older) • The assessment tool is aligned with the WMELS and/or the SACF • Assessments that are designed by the program may be used if they are developmentally appropriate and meet the above requirements. The Consultant will determine if the assessment meets the requirement. 	<p>All classrooms use an ongoing assessment/ observation tool that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for assessing individual children. The following are required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal assessment is completed for each child at least two times per year (or the frequency recommended for the tool) in a culturally and linguistically responsive way (e.g., assistance from interpreter) by a trained administrator with cultural competence and sensitivity • The specific date each assessment was completed for each child is noted • The assessment tool must include the use of a developmental continuum (showing the progression of development from birth to five or older) and is valid and reliable for use with culturally and linguistically diverse children • The assessment tool is aligned with the WMELS and/or the SACF • Staff should observe multilingual children’s language use and development in a variety of routines and learning experiences throughout the day in all ECE settings (e.g., see <i>WIDA Early Years Essential Action 6</i>) • Assessments/observational tools that are designed by the program should only be used if it is not only developmentally appropriate, but also, culturally and linguistically responsive. The Consultant will determine if the assessment meets the requirement.

Rationale for Example Revisions and/or Additions Provided: It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss at length the many equity concerns around the assessment of multilingual children. However, we want to stress that valid and comprehensive assessment of multilingual children’s development and achievement is often challenging for ECE professionals (Espinosa & García, 2012). A persistent challenge in the field is the lack of assessment tools in languages other than English. Assessing multilingual children solely in English presents inequities because we fail to see a complete picture of what the child knows and can do (e.g., Children’s Equity Project & Bipartisan Policy Center, 2020; Espinosa, 2020; NASEM, 2017). When assessing or screening young multilingual children, it is vital to ensure that tools are valid, reliable, as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate for use with diverse populations of children. Moreover, to the extent possible, assessment tools should be administered by multilingual staff and in the home language of the child (e.g., Children’s Equity Project & Bipartisan Policy Center, 2020; NASEM, 2017). With our examples above we aimed to demonstrate how to address some of these pressing topics and issues within YoungStar.

Additional Examples of How to Revise QRIS Indicators

As part of our review, we referenced the report published by the Migration Policy Institute (Sugarman & Park, 2017) on QRIS indicators for supporting culturally and linguistically diverse children and ECE professionals. A prior version of Wisconsin's YoungStar system was referenced in this report and listed as having evidence to a few indicators related to cultural and linguistic diversity. In our review, we were unable to identify the same evidence within the YoungStar criteria provided to us by DCF. However, we found several promising examples of explicit indicators for supporting multilingual children in Sugarman and Park's report. As further examples of QRIS indicators that promote cultural and linguistic responsiveness, we present a few examples from Sugarman and Park (2017, p. 2):

- Curriculum, instruction, and/or activities are culturally responsive/appropriate
- Policy on support for native-language and English development
- Staff greet children and families in home languages
- Staff participate in community activities related to linguistic/cultural groups served by the program

As DCF explores ways to strengthen YoungStar and better support multilingual children and their families, the report by Sugarman and Park should be revisited to identify further examples of indicators that promote cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

Recommendations

In the subsequent sections, we offer two additional recommendations to help enhance YoungStar for Group Child Care so that it can promote equitable ECE opportunities for multilingual children and their families.

Be intentional and explicit

DCF is committed to reducing racial and ethnic disparities in ECE programs and services (DCF, 2020). Yet, there were very few instances of references to race and diversity within the reviewed criteria. Linguistic diversity may also result in disparities if ECE professionals do not recognize cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset and take intentional steps in their practice to support multilingual children's language development (e.g., Espinosa, 2020). It is vital for state agencies seeking to address equity in ECE to also consider linguistic diversity and not just racial and cultural diversity. Therefore, steps must be taken to make multilingual children and their families visible within and throughout *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022*. As stated in the discussion of Question #1, there were minimal instances of terms commonly used to describe or discuss multilingual children and their families within the document. That indicates multilingual children and their families are for the most part invisible within the criteria. By not including explicit references to the needs and experiences

of this diverse population, much is left to interpretation and “good intentions” on what is best for all children. As advocates for multilingual children, we must do more. Many educators may hold beliefs, values, and assumptions about populations of children and families that result in inequitable practice or barriers (e.g., Lindsey & Lindsey, 2011; NAEYC, 2019).

Intentional, explicit criteria, indicators, and examples of practice are needed to promote equity and support multilingual children. The ECE workforce does not reflect the diversity already present in many ECE programs and there is a need to better prepare the workforce in supporting multilingual children (e.g., NASEM, 2017). Thus, one cannot assume that all ECE professionals will interpret criteria with the needs of multilingual children and their families in mind. We offered a few examples of how to be intentional and explicit with regard to supporting multilingual children and their families in the example revisions and/or additions presented in Table 2, but more changes are needed throughout YoungStar.

Take a systemic approach

We recommend that DCF take a systemic approach to supporting multilingual children and their families. Investing in enhancing YoungStar will have implications in other areas. For example, introducing indicators on cultural and linguistic responsiveness will likely result in needs in workforce development. For instance, ECE professionals will need access to professional learning or teacher education coursework that helps them develop the competencies and knowledge necessary for promoting equity and providing culturally and linguistically responsive care and instruction.

Likewise, it may also result in needs for changes in family engagement practice. With regard to family engagement, DCF must also consider these questions: what resources are readily available to ECE professionals in languages other than English so they can partner with multilingual families in responsive and equitable ways? How might hiring practices change to actively recruit and hire staff that reflect the children and families served? How might programs implement language-focused family engagement practices in their work with families of multilingual children? There is no one-size-fits-all approach to family engagement and this is especially true when working with culturally and linguistically diverse families (e.g., Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Henderson et al., 2007).

Moreover, enhancements to YoungStar will require support for YoungStar Consultants. What steps will be taken to prepare YoungStar Consultants to apply an equity and language lens to their work with programs? What professional learning opportunities are available to Consultants and program staff? ECE professionals will need support, tools, and resources to build capacity around partnering with families of multilingual children. If enhancements are made to YoungStar, are DCF, its partners, and Wisconsin ECE programs ready to support ECE professionals as needs emerge in other areas?

To support WIDA Early Years states, we present six key areas,² rooted in equity and centered on language, to help guide a systemic approach toward supporting the unique needs and experiences of multilingual children and families in ECE settings (see Figure 3). Table 3 lists the key areas and offers DCF and stakeholders questions to guide discussions around the areas with a focus on YoungStar.

² The six key areas are adapted from the 2019 *Practical Guide for State Education Agencies to Promote Success of English Learners Pre-K - Grade 3* written by Alexandra Figueras-Daniel, Ph.D., for the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO).

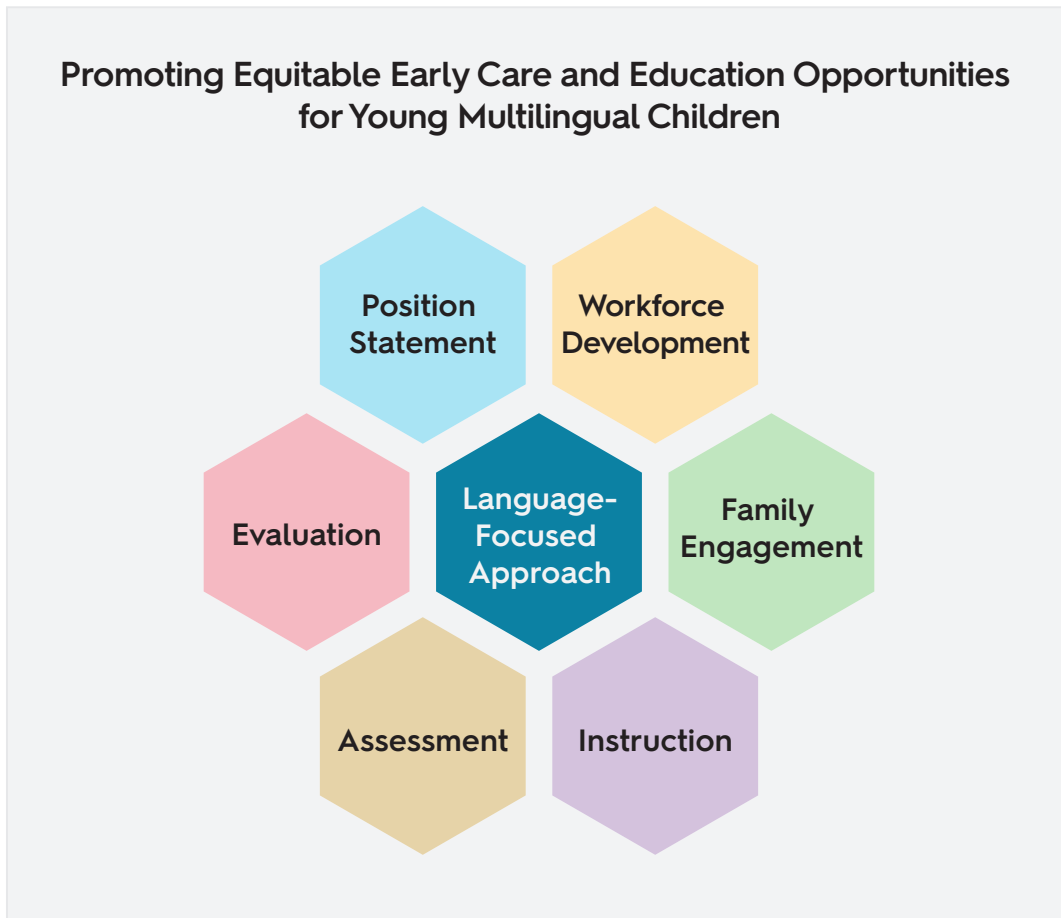
Table 3: Key Areas and Guiding Questions for DCF

<p>Position Statement: What do we (i.e., DCF) believe bilingualism and multilingualism afford the children in our state? Do our policies, guidance, and practice within <i>YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022</i> reflect our beliefs?</p>
<p>Workforce Development: What knowledge and skills do ECE professionals (e.g., teachers, providers, trainers, program leaders) and YoungStar Consultants need to better support multilingual children and families? How can we address these needs?</p>
<p>Family Engagement: How meaningful are YoungStar ratings and information provided to families of multilingual children? How can we gather input on YoungStar information and data from families of multilingual children in ways that are equitable as well as culturally and linguistically responsive?</p>
<p>Instruction: What messages do we communicate about the use of home languages when providing instruction? Are these messages consistent with our beliefs and goals for multilingual children? How are these messages reflected in YoungStar?</p>
<p>Assessment: What messages do we communicate about the use of home languages in assessing multilingual children? Are these messages consistent with our beliefs and goals for multilingual children? How are these messages reflected in YoungStar?</p>
<p>Evaluation: What evidence around equity and cultural and linguistic responsiveness is gathered through YoungStar? Is it enough? Are the example practices provided in YoungStar robust enough to reflect the diversity in the state?</p>

In addition to the questions listed in Table 3, we offer the following questions that can be used to guide discussion among key stakeholders:

- How can DCF leverage the findings presented in this report to initiate conversations about equity across the state’s ECE systems?
- How can DCF use these findings to support group child care programs in expanding access to high quality ECE programs?
- How can DCF invest in and develop the workforce to support multilingual children and their families?
- What can be done in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders/partners to address the findings and recommendations presented in this report?

Figure 3: Six Key Areas for Statewide Support



We encourage DCF to create an action plan for taking a systemic approach to enhancing YoungStar criteria. To assist in that process, we are offering DCF a sample action plan template (see Appendix) that could help with a systematic review across the six key areas discussed here. The template encourages state leadership teams to identify a goal within one or more of the six key areas and to develop a plan for achieving the goal. Below we offer an example of a goal related to the area of Evaluation, where YoungStar would fall under, and some sample tasks necessary for achieving the goal:

Key Area: Evaluation	
Goal:	Establish guidance within <i>YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Group Child Care 2021/2022</i> for monitoring the quality and cultural and linguistic responsiveness of program features related to instruction, assessment, and family engagement to ensure the unique needs and experiences of multilingual children and families are being addressed
Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing program evaluation tools to identify needs based on new policy/guidance • Integrate tools that collect meaningful evaluation data around practices used to support children’s language use and development during instruction and assessment • Integrate tools that collect meaningful evaluation data from families of multilingual children about their perceptions of how ECE staff and/or practices support their children’s language development and engage them as partners in their children’s early learning experiences • Identify ways to highlight exemplary local practices (e.g., arrange site visits, highlights on agency website) • Identify professional learning needs for disseminating enhanced/ revised evaluation tools • Plan a strategic, multilingual, and multimodal communication campaign to disseminate information on program evaluation

Conclusion

Wisconsin’s youngest learners are increasingly diverse (Park et al., 2018). While YoungStar for Group Child Care makes some references to engaging with diverse families, enhancements are needed to promote equity and support multilingual children and their families. High-quality ECE opportunities help children learn, develop, and thrive as individuals. For multilingual children, high-quality ECE opportunities also challenge inequities and help children flourish as multilingual and multicultural individuals. In its initial partnership year with WIDA Early Years, DCF gained access to statewide resources focused on multilingual children and families while it took steps to raise awareness about the needs of this diverse population. However, additional work is needed to enact meaningful change in YoungStar policy and practice. As partners, we look forward to continued opportunities to collaborate with DCF in this effort.

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Appendix: Statewide Planning: Action Plan Template



Statewide Planning: Action Plan Template

Key Area: Position Statement Family Engagement Assessment **Goal:**
 Workforce Development Instruction Evaluation

What will we do to achieve our goal?					
Tasks What tasks do we need to complete in order to reach our goal(s)?	Team Members Responsible/Involved Who will be the task lead? Who else will be involved?	Resources Needed What resources do we need?	Timeframe What are the start and end dates?	Evidence of Progress How and when will we measure progress toward task completion?	Evidence of Completion What are the final deliverables for the task?



WIDATM Early Years
Statewide Planning: Action Plan Template

How did we do?	
<p>What We Did What did we accomplish for this goal?</p>	
<p>The Results What was successful? What was a challenge? What evidence are we basing this on?</p>	

Where do we go from here?	
<p>Next Steps What still needs to be accomplished with regard to this goal?</p>	



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