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## **The Literacy Lab’s Leading Men Fellowship Awarded Preschool Development Grant Contract**

(MADISON) – The Department of Children and Families (DCF) awarded a \$350,000 contract to The Literacy Lab’s Leading Men Fellowship to grow and diversify the educator pipeline by engaging young men of color in early care and education careers.

The contract award comes as part of Wisconsin’s Preschool Development Grant (PDG) activities. The PDG is a one-year federal grant which allows Wisconsin to complete a needs assessment and a strategic plan to improve early care and education. The Literacy Lab’s Leading Men Fellowship’s program provides career preparation opportunities for young adult males of color, ages 18-24, who are looking to become early care and education teachers. Their program provides secondary education, hands-on experience, and access to life-long learning.

“I am thankful for everything the Leading Men Fellowship has done to improve our workforce pipeline and am excited to see what we can do together to advance the equity, access, and affordability goals of the PDG grant,” said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. “We have a legitimate challenge on the horizon when it comes to finding qualified, diverse professionals for our early care and education workforce. Wisconsin is fortunate to be able to leverage the PDG to help us solve the historic issues, as well as those created or exacerbated by the public health emergency, faced by our early care community.”

Literacy Lab’s Leading Men Fellowship acknowledges the national and statewide struggle to recruit and retain young men of color in the early care and education workforce. The program engages young men of color in careers in early childhood education by providing a rigorous, post-high school employment opportunity in order to improve pre-K children’s early literacy skills by providing daily, early literacy intervention for students who are low-income. The fellowship builds diversity for the

early care and education workforce by exposing young men of color to a career that they may not otherwise consider.

“It is imperative that young men of color access and remain visible in the Wisconsin early care and education workforce to help positively influence young minds alike, encourage excellence in and commitment to education, and promote more successful outcomes for young learners across the state,” said Calvin Lewis, Program Manager for The Literacy Lab.

The department received PDG funding to expand early care and education through birth to five initiatives across the state. Wisconsin’s plan focuses on addressing pervasive challenges around equity, access, quality, and affordability. The PDG provides Wisconsin an opportunity to enhance a strong early care and education system that engages partners at the state, regional, and local level to improve the well-being, healthy development, and kindergarten readiness among all children ages birth to five. The department also finalized contracts with the following providers to support PDG activities: Reach Out and Read, Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WI-AIMH), Families and Schools Together (FAST), The Registry, Institute for Poverty and Research, and UW Pediatrics.

#### **About The Literacy Lab’s Leading Men Fellowship**

The Literacy Lab was co-founded in 2009 by Teach for America and AmeriCorps alumna Ashley Johnson based on the community needs that she saw daily in her Washington, DC Public Schools classroom. She established the organization with a mission to provide low-income children with individualized reading instruction to increase their literacy levels, leading to improved academic success and greater opportunities in life. In the decade since, The Literacy Lab has provided intensive reading intervention to over 27,000 children in six states, including Wisconsin. In recognition of the importance of a diverse and high-quality early care and education workforce, in 2016, The Literacy Lab launched the Leading Men Fellowship program in Washington, DC. The Leading Men Fellowship quickly grew to four additional cities. In 2018, the Leading Men Fellowship expanded to Milwaukee.

**NOTE:** DCF recently launched an initiative to connect families with local child care in response to the changes many families experienced during the public health emergency. That includes [an interactive map](#) that displays open, available care and [an application for families](#) in need of child care. To learn more about DCF, visit [www.dcf.wisconsin.gov](http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov) and follow @WisDCF on Twitter and Facebook.

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