

Infant/early childhood social and emotional learning & infant/early childhood mental health consultation

There is huge potential for improving the lives of babies and young children, families and whole communities when you start with the youngest children. As a professional who works with these children/families you can attest to this.

Helpful points and Evidence:

- **Infants and young children have mental health needs too.**

Many people don't see infants and young children as having mental health issues and mistakenly assume they are too young. But it is estimated that between 9.5% and 14.2% of children age birth to 5 experience an emotional or behavioral disturbance. Preschool expulsion rates are more than three times the expulsion rate of students in kindergarten through 12th grade and Black boys are expelled at disproportionately higher rates than any other preschoolers. Challenging behaviors are cited as the number one reason children and families are asked to leave a program. These startling statistics make it clear that very young children can and do have mental health needs.

Ask the Governor and our Legislature to invest 12.6 million dollars to expand access to early social and emotional learning for children and coaching for early childhood educators, as well as the creation of a state-wide infant and early childhood mental health consultation system.

- **Studies show incorporating social and emotional development training and coaching,** such as implementing Pyramid Model, improves children's learning and reduces challenging behaviors.

- **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) supports** adults so they can continue to support children. IECMHC improves child-adult relationships, identifies and addresses concerns early, promotes racial equity by addressing implicit bias, increases staff knowledge and confidence to address concerns and reduces staff burnout and costly turnover.

- **The global pandemic presents both young children and adults with high degrees of trauma.** Now more than ever, families and professionals need access to increased understanding of social and emotional learning and coaching to ensure infants and young children, and the adults who care for them, are equipped with the skills and support necessary to fully recover.

- **Help reduce the likelihood of suspension and expulsion in early childhood** and aid the recovery of Wisconsin families from the COVID-19 crisis by:

- Funding early social and emotional development training/coaching (\$5 million)
- Creating an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health consultation system (\$5.3 million)
- Expanding Behavior Help Wisconsin (\$2.3 million)

- **Early investment reduces costs later in life.** Comprehensive, high-quality, birth-to-five early childhood programs for disadvantaged children yield a 7% - 13% return on investment per child. "It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men." *Frederick Douglas*

- **Positive returns on early investment in Infant Mental Health are immediate AND long term.** This investment will increase quality of care, support current and future workforce, and build school readiness and academic success.

- **We can't afford NOT to.** Given the current status of the crisis we cannot afford NOT to bring meaningful supports to reduce expulsion, enhance social and emotional development and mitigate the effects of trauma caused by racial disparities, economic hardship and global pandemic.