

Child Care Strong

Making critical investments in Wisconsin's early care and education field to support families, communities, and the economy



Child Care Strong has two goals:

1. Targeting the high cost of infant and toddler care, and
2. Lifting wages of the early care and education workforce to retain top talent.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing structural problems in the child care industry and laid bare its critical importance to Wisconsin's communities and economy. Throughout the public health emergency, Wisconsin led by prioritizing the needs of the early care and education community and we need to continue those vital investments.

The centerpiece of the Governor's early care and education budget, **Child Care Strong** is a \$106 million investment over the biennium in our early care and education system that provides bonus payments and per child stipends to providers to address quality, affordability, accessibility, and equity for children both in Wisconsin Shares and unsubsidized childcare.

Child Care Strong consists of three separate programs:

Base payments of up to \$250 per month, providing resources for providers to meet regulatory and quality requirements

A bonus payment of up to \$150 per month for providers who serve at least 25% infant and toddlers, incentivizing the provision of care to infants and toddlers

Per child monthly stipends for YoungStar 3-, 4-, and 5-star programs, with higher stipend amounts for infants, toddlers, and Wisconsin Shares recipients, helping providers maintain and increase their quality

All programs require providers to allocate more than half of the total monthly payments towards staff salaries and benefits



Wisconsin Department of
Children and Families

Recommendations for Governor Evers

Early Childhood Advisory Council 2020 Report

Dear Governor Evers,

The COVID-19 public health emergency has placed unprecedented stress on Wisconsin's early care and education sector. We thank you for the resources that you and the Wisconsin legislature have provided throughout 2020—\$131 million of federal relief dollars to keep early care and education programs open. This tremendous investment has allowed more than 123,000 children to continue in child care, helping their parents stay in the workforce, and kept 26,411 child care educators employed.

The current public health emergency also has underscored that affordable, high-quality early care and education is essential for Wisconsin's children, families, and economy to thrive. As a system that is vital to our state's well-being, early care and education requires sustained support. To that end, the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) recommends three investments to promote the healthy development of children and to strengthen Wisconsin's early care and education system for the long-term. The recommendations are to support the compensation, recruitment, and retention of early care educators; strengthen family resource centers; and reduce early childhood suspension and expulsion by providing additional training and supports for caregivers.

The ECAC recognizes the difficult economic situation that the State of Wisconsin is in as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency. However, it makes these recommendations as part of its responsibility to advise you on strategies that will strengthen Wisconsin's early care and education system. The ECAC presents this report with the understanding that these recommendations can move forward only to the extent that funding is available.

To that end, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has put forward a budget proposal that is aligned to the ECAC recommendations, including funding to support providers of high-quality child care programs and to increase social and emotional training and support for early childhood educators. DCF and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in collaboration will seek additional grant funding for the other recommendations that the ECAC has outlined in this report.

The ECAC is comprised of diverse members that include key leaders in early care and education, child health and welfare, family support, and business. It reached its recommendations after a two-year process that included a needs assessment and significant research on best practices. The ECAC continues its commitment to promoting evidence-based, high-impact investments that can improve outcomes for Wisconsin children. The need for this type of investment is now clearer than ever. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations that will help us meet the goal of ensuring that all Wisconsin children are healthy, nurtured, safe, and successful.

Sincerely,

Secretary Emilie Amundson (Co-Chair)
State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor (Co-Chair)

Three Investments to Improve Early Care and Education in Wisconsin

Early Childhood Advisory Council 2020 Report



Investing in Early Childhood Educators

Wisconsin's early education providers struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff, which significantly impacts the availability and quality of early education. We recommend the governor dedicate funds in the state budget to support recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

Expanding Access to Family Support Services through Family Resource Centers

To ensure families have access to supports and resources, we recommend the governor advocate for the essential role of FRCs and increase investments to make the services of FRCs available to more families.

Reducing Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion

Preschool expulsion rates are more than three times the expulsion rate of students in kindergarten through 12th grade. To address the challenge of early suspension and expulsion, including the disproportionate impact on Black boys, Wisconsin must invest in training and coaching for caregivers and the creation of a statewide infant and early childhood mental health consultation system to support the social and emotional learning for children.

For more information on the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council and the detailed budget papers that support these recommendations visit <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ecac>

SMART INVESTMENT 1: Investing in Early Childhood Educators

High-quality early childhood education is a powerful two-generation strategy, one that enables workforce participation and productivity for parents and confers long-lasting educational, civic, economic, and personal benefits for children.¹ But Wisconsin's early education providers struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff, which significantly impacts the availability and quality of early education, particularly for infants and toddlers. We recommend the governor dedicate funds in the state budget to support recruitment and retention of early childhood educators in order to maintain and expand access to high-quality early education programs.

Evidence-Based

According to researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank, return on investment from quality early childhood programs for children from low-income families "range from \$4 to as high as \$16 for every dollar invested."²

High-Impact

Early childhood teacher turnover averages 30% annually, and assistant teacher turnover averages 45% annually.³ Low compensation is a key reason for recruitment and retention challenges that lead to shortages in quality care. In Wisconsin, early childhood educators with an associates degree earn an average of \$10/hour and those with a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$12/hour, both falling well below the statewide averages for workers with post-secondary degrees.⁴ Within the early care and education sector, the issue of inadequate compensation is most severe for infant and toddler educators. Teaching staff in child care centers who work with children three or younger earn about 70% of what those working with children three to five years old earn.⁵

Staffing challenges are the primary contributor to extreme shortages in access to child care. Statewide, over half of people live in a child care desert, where there are either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed care slots.⁶

Smart Investment

Increasing recruitment and retention among early childhood educators will increase both the availability and quality of early childhood education. This will benefit Wisconsin's children, by giving them foundational skills for success in school, the workplace, and society; families, by allowing parents of young children to participate in the workforce; and employers, by allowing local business to attract and retain parents of young children as employees.



"By laying the crucial groundwork for tomorrow's workforce and promoting a strong workforce today, high-quality childcare provides a powerful two-generation approach to building the human capital that a prosperous and sustainable America requires."

US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High Quality Childcare

SMART INVESTMENT 2: Expanding Access to Family Support Services through Family Resource Centers

Family resource centers (FRCs) are critical to the health and well-being of Wisconsin's children and families. They serve as community hubs for family support, offer programs and services that reduce risk factors for child abuse and neglect, and improve outcomes such as school readiness and child well-being. To ensure families have access to supports and resources, we recommend the governor recognize and advocate for the essential role of FRCs. We further recommend investing to stabilize family support services in local communities and increasing those investments to make the services of FRCs available to more families.



Evidence-Based

FRCs offer critical services such as parenting education and home visiting, some that are universally available and some that are targeted to families experiencing specific risk factors. Studies show reduced rates of child abuse and neglect investigations in communities that have a FRC compared to similar communities that did not in Allegheny County, PA,⁷ and lower rates of substantiated cases and foster care placements over time when a strong network of FRCs was established in San Francisco.⁸

High-Impact

In addition to reductions in child maltreatment, benefits of FRC include:

Improved family functioning

Parents participating in FRC services report increased protective factors including parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, access to concrete support in times of need, and children's social and emotional competence.

Essential services in times of crisis

During the pandemic, FRCs quickly adapted to provide educational and support services in a virtual format and have reported serving families they never had before. This speaks to the importance of affordable high-speed broadband access for families to be able to benefit from these supports—even when they are not provided in their immediate geographic area.

Only eight of Wisconsin's family resource centers currently receive any funding from the state, but many more are providing critical services to strengthen families and reduce child maltreatment. Increasing support for FRCs statewide would be an investment in brighter futures for Wisconsin's families and communities.

Smart Investment

Research has shown that high-quality FRCs have a return of up to \$4.93 for every dollar invested.⁹

SMART INVESTMENT 3: Reducing Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion

Preschool expulsion rates are more than three times the expulsion rate of students in kindergarten through 12th grade.¹⁰ Moreover, Black boys are expelled at significantly higher rates than other children.¹¹ To address the challenge of early suspension and expulsion and the resulting inequities, we recommend investing in training and coaching for caregivers and the creation of a statewide infant and early childhood mental health consultation system to support the social and emotional learning for children. We also recommend the governor continue to speak out about the importance of social and emotional learning and the negative impact of suspension and expulsion on children's future development.

Evidence-Based

Providers cite that challenging behaviors are the number one reason for expelling children from preschool settings.¹² Studies show incorporating social and emotional development training and coaching reduces challenging behaviors and improves children's learning.¹³ In addition, infant and early childhood mental health consultation reduces episodes of challenging behaviors and strengthens early education program quality by improving child-adult relationships, identifying concerns early, promoting racial equity by addressing implicit bias, and reducing staff turnover.^{14/15/16}



"Preschool expulsions and suspensions are not child behaviors; they are adult decisions."

Walter Gilliam, PhD

High-Impact

The first five years of life are a critical time of rapid brain development, when children particularly need stable, sensitive, and consistent caregiving. This provides a solid foundation for learning and building healthy relationships. Benefits of this investment include:

High-quality care

Child care centers that receive infant and early childhood mental health consultation demonstrate increases in positive teacher-child interactions—a strong predictor of child care quality.¹⁷

Support for current and future workforce

Stable, high-quality child care allows parents to work. Children gain life-long social and emotional skills—such as managing strong feelings, building friendships, and problem solving—necessary for successful education and future employment.

Smart Investment

A suspension can be life altering, especially for preschoolers, who, if expelled, are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed, rely on social welfare programs and face imprisonment.^{18/19} These lifelong consequences make it critical to reduce and eliminate early childhood suspension and expulsion.

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, [Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare, 2017](#); The Heckman Equation, Perry Preschool: Intergenerational Effects, [Early childhood education strengthens families and can break the cycle of poverty](#).
- 2 Rob Gruenwald, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, [Investments in Young Children Yield High Public Returns](#)
- 3 Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services and Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, [Wisconsin's Child Care Workforce: Wages, Benefits, Education, and Turnover of the Professionals Working with Wisconsin's Youngest Children](#)
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- 5 Marcy Whitebook, et al., Administration for Children and Families, [Addressing Infant-Toddler Teacher Compensation](#), 2015.
- 6 Center for American Progress, <https://childcaresdeserts.org/?state=WI>
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