

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Wisconsin Early
Childhood Association

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Take a moment with me to envision, together, a Wisconsin and United States where early care and education (ECE) is viewed as a public good worthy of long-term, sweeping and sustained public funding.

It is a vision where our child care system supports children and families, child care professionals, communities, businesses and the economy.

In this vision, early childhood educators are compensated at a level that matches their education, experience and dedication.

In this vision, child care is affordable for all families of young children.

In this vision, child care deserts are rare – or, better yet, do not exist.

In this vision, businesses have employees who do not struggle with child care challenges.

In this vision, communities and the economy flourish.

In this vision, an unprecedented health crisis would not have exacerbated longstanding challenges. Instead, the child care landscape would be built with resources to ensure it meets the needs of all those impacted by it – no matter the social, health, political or economic circumstances.

This vision guides the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association's continued advocacy efforts and our steadfast support of early childhood professionals who are the backbone of high-quality child care for our children.

The early care and education sector has long contributed to the economic and social health of our communities. Particularly important is the sector's perseverance through the continued effects of the pandemic over the past year. Programs have worked to remain open throughout fluctuations in public health guidance on vaccinations and masks and continued to care for our youngest children when most of them could not yet be vaccinated. By extension, child care has served as a vital lifeline for working families.

Early childhood educators have continued their important work through challenging circumstances despite being significantly undercompensated while they provide this essential service for children, families, communities and the economy.

WECA is proud to stand alongside these dedicated professionals and this sector as a partner, advocate, supporter and voice for more than 50 years – but especially over the past year.

WECA was at the ready when it was time to distribute more than \$8 million in federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) funding as stipends to thousands of early childhood educators through the Workforce Retention and Recognition Program. Our REWARD Wisconsin Stipend Program staff worked diligently to get this much-needed relief to more than 15,000 individuals in a timely fashion.

The Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESN) continued its growth across the state and its efforts to provide critical back-office and administrative services to programs, helping to keep programs open and staff supported through constantly evolving and challenging circumstances.

WEESN – whose expansion was bolstered, in part, by \$5.5 million in CRRSAA funding – continued to be a go-to resource for the many questions child care programs and professionals have had as they navigate the challenges of the pandemic, including information on the state's Child Care Counts program. Both the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and CRRSAA included multiple rounds of funding to provide regular payments to programs through Child Care Counts since fall 2020.

Governor Tony Evers and the Wisconsin State Legislature were critical in swiftly allocating a total influx of more than \$278 million in federal relief funding – CARES Act and CRRSAA – for child care initiatives and getting it into the hands of early childhood educators and programs across the state. We applaud and are grateful for these timely efforts.

In the midst of constantly evolving circumstances, we keep our long-term vision – that beacon – for a stronger, more sustainable child care infrastructure in mind, especially as we continue our advocacy efforts to bring transformative change to early care and education. As the state worked to allocate that much-needed relief over the past year, WECA continued to bring the voices of business and economic leaders, early childhood professionals and parents to the forefront with policymakers and legislative leaders.

The message and reality of child care's importance is being recognized throughout the state, and we are optimistic about what that means for the future – and the prospect of early care and education being viewed and invested in as a public good.

We look forward to the time when our guiding vision becomes reality. In the meantime, WECA stands proudly as a tireless advocate for ECE professionals and the ECE infrastructure in Wisconsin. Our early childhood professionals, children, families and communities deserve no less.



Ruth Schmitt

WECA Executive Director

ANNUAL CONFERENCE



BY THE NUMBERS



550 Attendees



27 Live Workshops
3 Keynotes
14 On-Demand Sessions



2 Nature-Inspired Events



3 Virtual Escape
Room Experiences

GLOBAL REACH



Countries: United States,
Canada, Singapore

States in the U.S.:
Wisconsin, California,
Indiana, Illinois, Iowa,
Maryland, Michigan,
Minnesota, North Carolina

WECA's 2021 conference returned in a virtual format to provide early childhood educators a safe way to attend this longstanding professional development event, which was founded in 1971.

The conference, with the theme "Strength Through Connections," focused on promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in the classroom, navigating early childhood education during the pandemic, and finding creative ways to virtually connect.

The event was attended by hundreds of early childhood educators from Wisconsin, across the United States and even some other countries. The live workshops, on-demand sessions, nature-inspired learning and virtual early childhood escape rooms were informative, impactful and engaging.

WECA continues to receive positive feedback on the conference's virtual format, which began in 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic. The format allows WECA to continue to ensure early childhood educators have the ability to attend, learn and gain professional development experiences, no matter their geographic location.

Food Program

BY THE NUMBERS



2,000,000 Meals
and Snacks Served



5,000 Young Children
Served



550 Family Child Care
Providers Served



72 Counties and **11** Tribal
Nations in Wisconsin Served

WECA's Food Program, launched in 1968, is supported through funding from the United States Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). It remains the only food program in Wisconsin to serve all 72 counties and all Tribal nations.

The Food Program has remained instrumental in allowing family child care providers to serve nutritionally balanced meals and snacks to children throughout Wisconsin. The assistance was particularly critical during the continued stresses and challenges of the pandemic in 2021, which included daily enrollment fluctuations and COVID-19 exposure concerns.

In fall 2021, the Food Program disbursed an additional \$122,000 in federal funds, which were made available to programs that were impacted by declining revenue or COVID-related closures in the early months of the pandemic.

Additionally, the program transitioned to electronic processes for child enrollment and Parent Provider Formula agreements for infant children. This was an important step because it resulted in a reduction in printing, paper and mailing expenses and, by extension, more efficiencies for Food Program staff while serving family child care providers.

The Food Program remains the vital resource it has been since its inception 53 years ago. Its work supports family child care providers in their critical daily role in children's lives and their overall health, wellness and development.

MEMBERSHIP



MEMBERSHIP PROVIDES



Professional Development



Advocacy Power



Networking



Resources

WECA membership is valuable: WECA is the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which is the largest professional membership association of early childhood educators in the United States.

WECA has more than 1,200 members. Membership to both WECA and NAEYC provides a vital connection to local, state and national professional development opportunities, networking and other key benefits.

In 2021, the WECA Conference offered a new opportunity for a small group of members to take part in a private session about the shared resources platform, Wisconsin Shared Education Resources (WISER). WECA offered these session attendees a free one-year membership to WISER. The added incentive prompted 100 conference registrants to sign up for WECA membership with their conference registration.

Members of WECA's Grassroots Advocacy Network participated in WECA's Advocacy Week and NAEYC's Public Policy Forum in early 2021. Members had the opportunity to engage with Wisconsin policymakers in advocacy efforts to share the daily challenges of early childhood educators. The connections made through the network continue to support members' professional development in addition to elevating their voices and building confidence in advocacy efforts and their impact.

"The biggest personal success was gaining more confidence in me. I am more of an introverted-type person. The experience I gained was to be able to get out of my comfort zone and network with others who believed in the same goals and outcomes," shared a WECA member. "We, as a team, built a community of strong and trusting relationships. I learned how to talk to others when it comes to an 'ask.' Overall, it was a life-changing experience, and I am forever grateful for the skills and relationships that were built."

REWARD WISCONSIN STIPEND PROGRAM



BY THE NUMBERS



1,854 Stipends Issued

1,482 Individuals Received Stipends

\$268 Average Stipend

100% of Recipients Have Specialized Credentials or Degrees

Short-Term Initiatives

Workforce Retention and Recognition Program



15,511 One-Time Stipends

\$300 or **\$550** Stipends

53206 Initiative



220 One-Time Stipends

\$600 Average Stipend

Federal and state funding continues to support WECA's longtime REWARD Wisconsin Stipend Program and other short-term stipend initiatives. WECA's REWARD program staff facilitated three major stipend projects in 2021, each with the important common thread of providing vital supplemental financial support to early childhood educators who continue to work in a traditionally under-resourced field.

The first program was the continuation of the REWARD Wisconsin Stipend Program, which marked its 20th anniversary year. REWARD has long been supported by federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding that, in the last fiscal year, was included in the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and allocated by the state to child care. Stipends were awarded every six months to eligible professionals to increase income and encourage retention in the field.

"Thank you very much for all the extra support you all have given. That extra money here and there has helped so much over the years – especially when I became a single mom for some trying years, the extra money is a blessing," shared a REWARD recipient.

The second – and short-term initiative – was the state's Workforce Retention and Recognition Program, which was supported through approximately \$8.2 million in federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) funding. One-time stipends were awarded to individuals working in early childhood direct care roles.

The final program was the expansion of the 53206 Early Care and Education Initiative, which is supported by the state Department of Children and Families. The program provides stipends to any staff who work in a child care program within that Milwaukee-specific zip code.



BY THE NUMBERS



814 Individuals on T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships

21,574 Children Served by Scholars

444 Contracts Completed

4.16% Average Wage Increase*

*Center Employees Who Completed Contract

Scholars Worked In



273 Group Centers

92 Family Child Care Programs

Academic Accolades



3.62 Average GPA

3,171 Courses Completed

9,406 Credits Taken

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Wisconsin has been offering scholarships to early childhood educators throughout Wisconsin since 1999 to make credit-based education more affordable, improve teacher compensation and improve early childhood teacher retention.

Over its entire 22-year history, T.E.A.C.H. has made a resounding impact in early care and education (ECE) by awarding more than 18,000 scholarships to more than 10,000 recipients. Scholarships support their efforts to complete credit-based early childhood education coursework through the Wisconsin Technical College System, University of Wisconsin System and private colleges.

"It's hard work, but it is so valuable and so worth it to get this kind of support in your education and the growth it allows in your ECE career," shared a T.E.A.C.H. recipient.

Center directors also note the impact on professional development of early childhood educators and on the care and education children receive as a result of the investment.

"I absolutely love the T.E.A.C.H. program. It helps us to keep a lot of teachers at our center," shared a director of a sponsoring center. "It also helps our teachers to gain their knowledge giving the best care to the children we have at our facility."

Importantly, the program supports ECE professionals with wide-ranging and non-traditional student backgrounds, including those who are parents, grandparents and/or first-generation college students. Center-based employees who completed contracts experienced an average wage increase of more than 4 percent.

WISCONSIN EARLY EDUCATION SHARED SERVICES NETWORK



BY THE NUMBERS

WEESSN Reach



12 Counties
Crawford, Dane, Grant,
Green, Iowa, Jackson, La
Crosse, Lafayette, Milwaukee,
Monroe, Richland and Vernon

Virtual Site Visits

659 Visits
140 Programs

Heathy Food Pilot



276,000 Pounds of Fresh
Produce
62 Programs in Dane County
and Milwaukee
12 Weeks

MOST SUPPORTED TOPICS

Business Practices	Curriculum/Learning Environments
Grants/Finance	Technology
Licensing/ Accreditation	

The Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESSN) continued to expand its reach throughout Wisconsin in 2021 to meet the evolving needs of child care programs, families and communities.

Preparation began for the rollout of Tier 1 and Tier 2 services across the state, gearing up to add them to the existing suite of Tier 3 supports. Tiered services allow programs to benefit from shared resources, knowledge, expertise and back-office assistance. Support from the Department of Children and Families and other funding is important for continued innovation.

Investments in technology systems strengthened the internal WEESSN infrastructure, including the addition of a centralized, remote back-office service. WEESSN also advocated for a change in state-level practice to enable equitable usage of technology for family child care programs. Past practices prohibited providers from meeting administrative requirements electronically, like center-based providers.

It is critical that WEESSN coaches have direct experience in child care programs. This allows them to bring expertise and provide tailored supports and resources. Regional staffing gives coaches the unique context providers experience in their communities as they provide assistance with business practices, finances, licensing, technology, curriculum and learning environments.

"WEESSN gives you the opportunity to be a part of something bigger. They provide updated information about what is happening in the world of early childhood education. Along with organized resources and dedicated staff, they will help you find the information you are looking for at the click of a mouse," a provider shared. "WEESSN is definitely a time saver, and I would recommend it to anyone in the early childhood field!"

WEESSN's extensive connections with child care programs was integral to the success of a pilot program to foster healthy eating and reduce food insecurity among early educators, children and families. More than 60 WEESSN-affiliated programs in Milwaukee and Dane counties received more than 276,000 pounds of fresh produce over the course of the 12-week program.

WISCONSIN INFANT TODDLER POLICY PROJECT

WISCONSIN INFANT
TODDLER POLICY PROJECT



SURVEY SAYS



A poll of **605 Wisconsin voters** shows sweeping recognition that early care and education is essential and contributes to economic productivity.



93%: ECE is crucial for parents to work and contribute to the economy.



78%: Child care is an essential service.

WECA ADVOCACY WEEK



250 Constituents Registered
100+ Legislative Districts

CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION ENGAGEMENT



20 Meetings

The Wisconsin Infant Toddler Policy Project (WITPP) celebrated a series of advocacy milestones and wins in its important work to advocate on behalf of the state's youngest children and their families. WITPP's efforts build upon decades of WECA's advocacy to support early care and education (ECE) in Wisconsin and the early childhood workforce.

WECA organized, facilitated and participated in numerous legislative meetings to elevate the importance of child care with policymakers, including an informational hearing in front of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families. The hearing, broadcast on Wisconsin Eye, included testimony from experts and leaders, including ECE advocacy organizations, businesses and economic development associations.

The WITPP coalition also presented to the bipartisan Legislative Children's Caucus with perspective from WECA, United Way-Wisconsin, Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative and Wisconsin Counties Association. WECA's Advocacy Week, in its first-ever virtual format, brought together hundreds of constituents to share the importance of the new state budget investment for infants, toddlers and Wisconsin's workforce and economy.

WECA conducted numerous legislator-employer meetings on child care to connect business leaders and child care providers with every member of Wisconsin's Congressional delegation. The meetings covered the importance of strong investments in child care to support business and economic productivity.

Importantly, a WITPP-initiated poll of Wisconsin voters found there is bipartisan awareness of child care's importance: More than 9 in 10 voters agree ECE programs are crucial for parents to work and contribute to the economy. More than 3 in 4 agreed child care is an essential service like education and health care. This is important as WECA's advocacy efforts move forward.

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT

WECA remains committed to being a trusted steward of public and private funds that advance early care and education and support the ECE workforce across Wisconsin. WECA is grateful for donors' generous financial and in-kind support and will continue to work tirelessly on behalf of this sector.

Individuals

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National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
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Wisconsin Partnership Program, UW Madison School of Medicine and Public Health
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

In-Kind Donations

Boomer Naturals
Children's Literacy Initiative
Lighthouse Church and School
Scott Miller
State Line Distillery

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The purpose and focus of the Board is to carry out the legal, fiduciary and operating responsibilities of WECA. We are proud to recognize them for their volunteer service.



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University of Wisconsin-Madison,
Wisconsin Partnership Program, Madison, WI



Latisha Spence-Brookens

Moraine Park Technical College, Menomonee Falls, WI

2021 FINANCIALS

	2021	2020
Revenue		
Federated Campaigns	\$9,397	\$8,415
Food Program	\$3,169,258	\$3,000,873
T.E.A.C.H. & REWARD	\$4,960,344	\$4,393,636
WEESSN SW PDG	\$283,288	\$88,449
Jackson County	\$74,208	\$-
WEESSN CRRSAA Expansion	\$134,125	\$-
CRRSAA Workforce Retention	\$8,202,727	\$-
Paycheck Protection Program	N/A	\$338,910
In-kinds	\$199,951	\$44,900
Individuals, Corporations, Foundations	\$1,392,182	\$1,489,626
Other Contracts	\$224,473	\$392,437
Contributions	\$ -	\$ -
Membership	\$24,100	\$24,678
Fees for Service	\$159,081	\$51,965
Annual Conference	\$19,596	\$65,472
Training Events	\$ -	\$ -
Interest	\$2,927	\$6,488
Miscellaneous	\$52,619	\$34,436
TOTAL REVENUE	\$18,908,276	\$9,940,285
Expenses		
Direct: Operations	\$16,276,537	\$7,464,979
Direct: Personnel	\$2,804,174	\$2,115,167
Indirect: Administration	\$159,853	\$136,239
Total Expenses:	\$19,240,564	\$9,716,385
Change in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$73,243	\$(25,565)
Change in Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	\$(405,531)	\$249,465
Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	\$(332,288)	\$223,900

A POWERFUL NETWORK

WECA's mission to support early care and education across Wisconsin is strengthened through the powerful, collective voices of advocates and allies.

There are several ways to join the effort and begin making a difference.



Donate: Contributions of any size are critical for pushing WECA's work forward. Visit WECA's website and click [Donate](#).



Advocate: Join WECA's advocacy network to receive updates and action alerts on key early care and education policy efforts. Visit [WECA's website](#) to learn more.



Join: WECA membership unlocks valuable resources and tools to support early childhood educators and ECE advocates. Learn more about membership and how to join on [WECA's website](#).



Connect: WECA's network of followers – early childhood educators, donors, supporters and community partners – continues to grow. Join in the conversation to stay up to date.



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Find us on Instagram at [WECAEarlyEd](#)



Follow us on Twitter at [@EarlyEdMatters](#)



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Check out our videos on YouTube at [Wisconsin Early Childhood Association](#)



Collect child care resources on our Pinterest page at [@wisconsinearlylc](#)

Social Media at a Glance

There is power in a network of social connections.



5,460 Followers



874 Followers



493 Followers



482 Followers



419 Followers



285 Followers

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