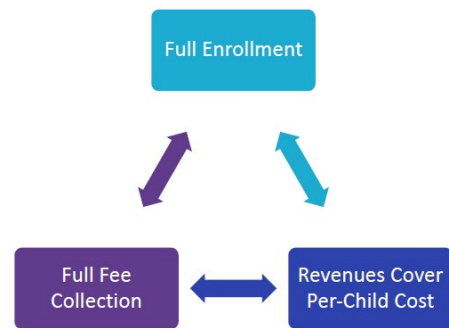


## Measuring What Matters: Impact of Data Collection in Wisconsin's ECE Shared Services Network

Understanding and evaluating the impact of a new service is critical to improving its offerings and meeting its mission. For Wisconsin Early Childhood Association's ground-breaking program, Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESSN), the evolution of programming and assessment go hand in hand. Recently compiled data now concretely illustrate WEESSN's impact on Wisconsin's early childhood landscape: early care and education providers that use WEESSN Tier 3 services have strong financial policies, see lower turnover, and feel confident about their financial future.

While qualitative insights had been gathered in 2022, a desire for quantitative data that could be tracked over time became a focus in 2023. Teams from [WEESSN](#), [Opportunities Exchange](#) (OppEx), and [Luminary Evaluation](#), a Massachusetts-based evaluation firm, developed a unique, data-driven approach to measure WEESSN's impact, collaborating on the evaluation design process and engaging business coaches as data collection partners. They will share key evaluation findings, program impact and opportunities, and plans for future enhancements in an [online presentation](#) on Thursday, Feb. 22.

Fueled by pandemic-era federal and state funding, along with generous philanthropic support, WEESSN's growth over the past five years has been rapid and it is recognized as a national leader in shared services for the child care sector. Along the way, it benefited greatly from input by Louise Stoney of OppEx, who pioneered [Iron Triangle of ECE financial model](#). In refining the services WEESSN offers, it became clear that program implementation and data collection could be pursued at the same time.



"As a relatively new innovation in the ECE sector, this data is not only informing the WEESSN team but also telling a larger story about how a shared services network like ours helped providers maximize their revenues," commented Paula Drew, WEESSN Co-Director. "WEESSN is financed in part with public funding, so it is critical that the program is creating the most benefit to those receiving services."

The evaluation had two goals: explore overall impacts of WEESSN programming and cultivate metrics the WEESSN team could use for data-driven decision making. The collaboration between WECA, Luminary, and Opportunities Exchange started by drafting a [logic model](#) that maps each input and activity against outputs, outcomes, and the high-level impact of contributing to the greater sustainability of capacity across the Wisconsin early care and education system.



Following the logic model creation, the team designed data collection methods and protocols. This resulted in three surveys: WEESN Annual Survey, WEESN Quick Check Survey, and WEESN Annual Satisfaction Survey.

“WEESN's ‘data-incorporated’ model means that coaches gather the quantitative data needed to fully articulate WEESN's impact and formatively shape the program,” said Alison LaRocca, President and CEO, Luminary Evaluation. “At the same time, when coaches serve as data collectors, they engage providers in a collaborative self-reflection that gives them immediate, actionable feedback to guide individual action planning and goal setting.”

For the Annual Survey evaluation, coaches worked with nearly 240 Tier 3 programs to gather data reflecting their individual financial successes in relation to the Iron Triangle ECE financial model. The data and findings from this evaluation serve as a baseline to measure changes in WEESN-enrolled programs annually into the future.

“Baseline data related to individual provider business practices and financial matters can be very challenging for Shared Service Alliances to gather,” commented Amy Friedlander from OppEx. “Typically, Alliances ask providers to complete lengthy surveys on their own, and others just skip this step altogether. But providers frequently are unclear about how or why to answer survey questions around financial matters, resulting in incomplete and/or inaccurate baseline data.

“Without this crucial data set, however, coaches aren't sure how or where to dig into the Iron Triangle and business best practices with their providers. And Alliances lose the ability to tell their impact story with compelling, comparative data that illustrates change.”

Key categories measured by the evaluation include the following:

- Enrollment levels
- Full fee collection
- Gross profit margin (revenue vs. expenses)
- Policies that protect cash flow
- Financial management best practices
- Maximizing tax deductions
- Use of automated systems for payroll and timekeeping
- Employee retention
- Offering competitive staff benefits
- Investing in quality

Moving forward, the data collected will be used to track provider progress over time. The evaluation process identified several programmatic areas that can be strengthened as coaches work with their programs. Some examples:

- Most FCC programs do not have an annual administrative fee in place, which may be an opportunity to increase revenue.
- Many FCC programs demonstrate having a budget, but would benefit from updating it more consistently, referring to it regularly, and using it to predict cash flow
- Paid time off is the most popular benefit offered to employees across the survey respondents, with lower average turnover rates for staff in programs offering PTO.

“WEESN continues to provide programming to help us maintain good business practices and offer outside opportunities to our staff. We are encouraged by the support for helping manage a nonprofit board along with long range goals and missions to support the ever-changing dynamic of early childhood care.” – Group Center Director

## Selected data and reflections on the evaluation's findings

### Cashflow policies

WEESSN coaches work with providers to ensure they have specific policies in place to protect cashflow and, equally important, that they use these policies effectively. Of WEESSN providers surveyed:

- 98% have at least two cashflow protection policies in place, out of a maximum of eight measures
- 81% have at least five cashflow protection policies in place
- 71% report full fee collection (i.e., no bad debt): 89% of family child care (FCC) and 54% of group centers (GCC)
- Only six group programs with all eight cashflow protection policies in place report having bad debt. This evidence supports WEESSN's practice of helping providers fully establish this set of policies as a means of effectively protecting cashflow and reducing the risk of bad debt.

### Turnover

WEESSN Tier 3 providers had significantly lower turnover rates when compared to a national average of 30% noted in a [July 2023 research study](#). Among Tier 3 group child care providers:

- 22% turnover rate for classroom staff
- 8% average turnover rate for administrators
- 17% turnover rate for support staff
- 5% turnover rate for classroom staff across Tier 3 WEESSN FCC providers
- Group and family child care programs that offer at least 2.5 hours of dedicated planning time per week have lower than average classroom teacher turnover rates than those that do not. For group programs there is an 11% difference.

### Satisfaction with programming

The satisfaction survey, which was administered independently by Luminary Evaluation (questions were not posed by program coaches) asked providers to indicate if their WEESSN membership has had a long-term impact on their businesses' sustainability.

#### Great confidence in their business's future

67% of GCC programs  
73% of FCC programs

#### Satisfaction and retention of programs

9 out of 10 average satisfaction rating  
81% of WEESSN Tier 3 programs have remained in the network at least one year or more

#### WEESSN has had at least a moderate impact on their business's sustainability.

98% of FCC programs  
86% of GCC programs

#### WEESSN offers value in the management of their business

- By saving them TIME: 93% FCC and GCC
- By saving them MONEY: 89% of FCC and GCC

### Examples of Impact Shared by Programs

- Navigating difficult decisions
- Receiving grants and incentives
- Understanding budgeting
- Providing substitutes

- Finding teachers through Acquire4Hire
- Policy review
- Community and connection
- Awareness of grant and funding opportunities
- Resource dissemination
- Trusted programming
- Navigating the end of federal relief funds
- Accountability for setting and reaching goals
- Addressing unexpected issues

### Impact Reflections from WEESN Members

**Policy Review:** “WEESN was a great resource when I asked them to go through our policies to make sure we were covering all our bases.”

**Awareness of Grant and Funding Opportunities:** “WEESN has provided me with a real person to communicate with and my coach has shared grant information with me to make sure I know what is available. I totally missed out on child care counts for years! I am also signed up for the Food Program now. Things used to seem overwhelming, and I had little time to read into more of what's out there. WEESN has helped me so much!”

**Trusted Programming:** “WEESN continues to provide programming to help us maintain good business practices and offer outside opportunities to our staff. We are encouraged by the support for helping manage a nonprofit board along with long range goals and missions to support the ever-changing dynamic of early childhood care.”

**Navigating Difficult Decisions:** “It really helped me to get ideas and have resources to navigate difficult decisions. I was a sole owner, and it was hard when I didn't have anyone to bounce ideas off of.”