

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) Response Brief:
Child Care Supply and Demand Challenges Survey
Results Highlight Need for Significant Investment of State Funding into ECE Workforce

WECA's Position

The results of the Child Care Supply and Demand Challenges Survey conducted by the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP), illustrate the need for significant state investment into early care and education (ECE) to stabilize and grow child care supply and meet the demand of parents and caregivers across Wisconsin. Access to high-quality child care is needed for at least three reasons: providing foundational education during young children's most important developmental period, families' ability to seek and maintain employment, and growing Wisconsin's broad workforce and economy.

The survey data shows that there are far fewer children being served in Wisconsin than anyone had imagined. More than 70 percent of ECE providers filled out a survey documenting that collectively they have 33,055 open spots in their programs overwhelmingly due to understaffing. The ECE workforce is the workforce that supports and sustains all other workforces. Without the early childhood sector's ability to recruit and retain staff, these challenges will persist and likely worsen. WECA calculates that for the surveyed programs to operate at capacity and make all spots available, they would need approximately 4,000 more full-time staff.

"Being able to afford higher wages and benefits for our qualified staff! We are in desperate need of financial assistance that is permanent (we can't increase wages or start health insurance because we won't be able to sustain it when funding ends.)"

Moreover, this survey data shows that the need for care is even greater than the total capacity for care that could be available if there were enough staff. This is evidenced by a documented 48,000 children on waitlists across Wisconsin. Meaning that even if providers were staffed appropriately and could fill all 33,055 open spots, there would still be a gap of 15,000 care spots needed. In total, there is a need for 6,000 more full-time staff and 300+ additional ECE programs to meet the demand of families needing care today.

Lastly, the Child Care Supply and Demand Challenges Survey highlights a significant demand for infant and toddler care. Roughly 70 percent of the waitlist requests were for children aged two years and under. It is far more expensive for ECE programs to serve younger children. With a broken child care market, providers simply can't serve younger children because it would put them out of business.

"Everyone is looking to start infants and under age 2. We are so limited in this availability. Then as soon as they turn 4, they are going to 4K in the school district because it is free. So, our opportunities of care are between newborn and age 3. This is very challenging."

WECA appreciates the efforts of all those who contribute to the early childhood research landscape, especially ECE providers, who continuously share their stories to help illuminate the trends programs, parents, employers, and communities across Wisconsin have long experienced and continue to face.

However, it is time to move beyond reporting on the same trends and into meaningful action. The results in this latest report are undeniably valuable but represent what providers, families, and ECE organizations already know and signal, yet again, that additional public dollars must be invested into early care and education.

Wisconsin needs to invest more than the lowest possible dollar amount into young children and families. That begins with the ECE workforce so that we can rely on them to care for and educate the next generation. Working families need access to affordable and accessible care and education settings, so that they can contribute to the workforce at their chosen rate. Most importantly, children deserve to be cared for and educated in high-quality settings. ECE should be funded as a public good so that it can continue to contribute to a thriving Wisconsin – now and into the future.

Elected officials and policymakers must take the lead on the next steps of significant investment of state funding. WECA, alongside so many passionate advocates, will use this information as yet another tool for telling the story of significant public investment. We can no longer afford to do any less.

Interested in learning more about this report? Click [here](#) for a more detailed review of the data.