

Weeca

Wisconsin Early
Childhood Association



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



MISSION

Advancing comprehensive and transformational support of the early childhood workforce.

VISION

A just Wisconsin where early care and education is viewed and invested in as a public good so all early educators, young children, families, and communities thrive.

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For nearly 55 years, WECA has existed to provide support for the early childhood workforce in Wisconsin. We have been and always will be centered in our purpose, but over the past year, we were deliberate in putting our mission and vision for early educators, children, families, our communities, and Wisconsin “on paper” ...

Mission: Advancing comprehensive and transformational support of the early childhood workforce.

Vision: A just Wisconsin where early care and education is viewed and invested in as a public good so all early educators, young children, families, and communities thrive.



As always, we ask what is “the story” of this latest fiscal year as we pen this message. Our mission and vision could not resonate more as we reflect both on the last year and the future. That story is a sequel to a sequel to yet another sequel of campaigns and longstanding grassroots efforts to advance public investment into early care and education – in a journey that began decades ago. The foundation was laid when providers and passionate ECE advocates came together for movements focused on worthy wages and significant public investment.

This history reminds us of how far we’ve come and also how far we have left to go.

We see the groundswell of public support growing – from a range of voices who are contributing to the conversation with elected officials. Even though 2024 represented an interim year of preparation and foundation setting for the next state budget cycle, the work was just as important as ever and generated significant public understanding that child care needs a sweeping public investment of state revenue.

Even though support grows, we’re still writing that Wisconsin has not yet achieved that significant investment child care demands – and, yes, deserves. Wisconsin invests a woefully small fraction in children under age 3 compared to those in K-12 public schools – despite both education systems being equally as important as the other.

In this report, you’ll see an overview of the ECE landscape in Wisconsin, which details its importance for child development and significant challenges across the sector in terms of the workforce, scarcity of care, increasing costs for families, and the implications of the sector operating in a failed market.

Following that are the ways WECA continues its innovative, transformative work to steer those trends in a positive direction through direct service programs and initiatives. This work is vitally important, especially as we wait for the sweeping public investments to be made that will allow for a complete transformation of the system and finally make it fair for all. The last fiscal year shed bright light on how critical public investments are and the difference they make – in fact, as some American Rescue Plan Act funding ended, it illustrated how critical it was for WECA to remain nimble and innovative, on behalf of the early childhood workforce and all the other good that follows when it’s supported in the way it should be.

That funding, coupled with the generosity and commitment of incredible philanthropic partners, ensures WECA continues its programs and services paired with leadership on engagement and education efforts driven toward a north star that child care is the foundation of a just Wisconsin.

We continue the path forward. Will you join us?



THE REALITY OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IN WISCONSIN

Return on Investment Is Clear

It is proven young children who have access to high-quality early care and education are healthier in the short and long term. ECE is critical education during the time of infants' and toddlers' most rapid brain development and, in turn, leads to stronger outcomes for children as they grow and enter adulthood, including in educational and career attainment – to name just two positive outcomes.

Early Childhood Workforce Challenges

Caring for and educating young children demands expertise in child development and the skills to nurture children during the most critical phase of brain development. Yet, wages for early educators – more than 80 percent of whom have completed some form of higher education – still lag the hourly wage of workers who have a high school diploma. Systemic changes to compensation are needed to meet the demanding nature of the career, long hours, and educational qualifications required. This will ensure programs can retain staff and serve families who need care in their communities.

Decline in Programs, High Demand for Care

The number of ECE programs operating in Wisconsin has steadily declined over the past decade – 30% overall from 2013 to early fall 2024, with a particularly steep decline in family child care programs over the same period. A majority of providers say the more than 33,000 open, unfilled seats across the state are due to ECE staffing challenges, which are fueled by compensation challenges and burnout. Providers report more than 48,000 children on waitlists, of which nearly three quarters are needed for children 3 years and under. It is clear that the inability to hire and retain ECE staff holds back supply of licensed child care across the state.



The Business of Child Care

The child care business model has been called a failed market because providers face significant limitations in offering higher wages, enhanced benefits, or facility/programming upgrades with income almost exclusively coming from the fees parents pay. Rising child care costs have outpaced Wisconsin's overall inflation rate in recent years, significantly contributing to an increasing number of families who are pushed into the red while trying to manage child care costs with other basic living expenses.

The Importance of Public Investment

Even though challenges for the early childhood sector have persisted for decades, the failed economics of child care were illuminated by the pandemic. Programs like Child Care Counts, which are funded by federal dollars allocated by the state, represented a necessary lifeline to keep more ECE programs from shuttering. Testimonials from the field show it is long past time to make substantial investments of state general purpose revenue to stabilize and grow the sector to meet the needs of children, families, and communities. The challenges, taken together, make clear an influx of public dollars is a necessary investment that will have short- and long-term returns for all who live and work in the state.



INFLUENCING THE TRENDS

ECE Workforce Support

WECA's core mission - its guiding north star - is to advance transformational support of the early childhood workforce. We have known since our founding that when early educators are supported, young children, their families, and entire communities are better for it.

WECA's work in the latest year ultimately reached educators who work to serve nearly 157,000 young children across the state.

We love how they're driving transformational change through really supporting those educators and providers, supporting young children and their families, and, ultimately, communities.

-Roots & Wings Foundation

That is why fiscal year 2024 represented another period of daily work to provide millions of dollars in direct payments to providers through its core programs, including the **REWARD Wisconsin Stipend Program** and a special one-time City of Milwaukee stipend program to increase the compensation of this underpaid field. At the same time, the **TEACH Early Childhood® Wisconsin Program** celebrated its milestone quarter-century anniversary, highlighting its important work to increase educational attainment of the field and, in turn, the wages of scholars who complete contracts and degrees in early childhood education. This work continues to be supported by strong partnerships with higher education institutions across the state.

The **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** provided partial reimbursements to family child care providers to serve healthy meals and snacks to young children in the breadth of food systems initiatives WECA offers, which also includes a variety of special programs, offerings, and opportunities through its shared services network to bring fresh foods and nutrition education resources to providers and children across the state.

WECA also continued preparations for an incredibly well-attended **2024 WECA Conference**, which featured in-person and virtual options for Wisconsin Registry credit - one of the core ways WECA provides professional development credit opportunities to the field. **Career Development Counseling** services experienced an increase in client inquiries from the previous year as counselors helped those interested in ECE navigate career paths and resources.

WECA's **Educator Assistance Program (EAP)** provided mental health and wellness resources to providers, staff, and their family members in programs enrolled in **Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESN)**. This important offering continued on the backdrop of significant mental health challenges of the field due to low wages, lack of access to benefits, and a trend of significant burnout.



Supporting Strong Business Practices

WESSN, which celebrated its fifth anniversary in 2024, remains a nationally recognized leader in helping child care programs develop strong business practices and increase efficiency so child care owners and administrators can focus more on what matters most – nurturing young children. WESSN prepared for its transition from three tiers of service to a new model that centers new businesses and those that receive fewer resources from other sources. This includes a base of core digital services and an offering that also includes one-on-one coaching with a business coach to help provide insight and resources on budgeting, enrollment, benefits, and connections to other resources.

In addition, WECA prepared for the release of a new book, **“Build It Strong!: How to Make Your Child Care Business Thrive from Start-up to Retirement,”** developed and authored in partnership with Opportunities Exchange as a first-of-its-kind resource that is part of broader efforts to provide trainings and resources dedicated to fostering solid business practices. This has the goal of ensuring the stability of new and existing programs in Wisconsin through step-by-step expert guidance on child care business practices.

WECA began offering **pre-licensing services** in the state’s northern and southeastern licensing regions, helping prospective providers prepare for the licensing process and setting them up with a solid foundation of connections to ECE programs, support, and resources. This is especially important in the context of the dire need for growing licensed care capacity to support young children and families.

Policy, Research, and Engagement Efforts

Keeping the spotlight on child care and how it provides a strong social and economic foundation for the state is critical. WECA’s policy, research, and engagement efforts continued in late 2023 and into fall 2024 and included dozens of engagement forums for providers and parents, community child care conversations in key regions of the state, child care awareness campaigns, and preparations needed to launch a virtual engagement training series. These offerings provided skills and resources to help educate legislators and policymakers about the importance of early care and education.

WECA partnered with Committee for Economic Development to develop a calculator tool to help illustrate the burden and strains of increasing child care costs for families with legislators, policymakers, and community officials. It is part of WECA’s larger work in partnerships and relationship building across people, organizations, and sectors to build awareness of the trends in child care, how they can engage, the most pressing opportunities for action, and how centering equitable opportunity in policy and research is central to the work.

WECA staff are regularly invited to speak at a wide range of local, regional, and statewide events, symposiums, forums, panels, and media opportunities as a trusted leader in the ECE community. As the 2024 fiscal year came to a close, the organization continued finalizing plans to launch its new **Center for Policy, Research and Engagement**, which has a goal to provide a formal home for synthesizing research into meaningful opportunities for action for providers, parents, community and business leaders, and elected officials. It is centered in the belief that focusing on accessible policy and research will help make meaningful program and systemic changes that are good for all early educators, children, families, and communities across the state.



WECA IMPACT: BY THE NUMBERS

WECA is a statewide nonprofit organization with significant local reach. It exists to support early childhood educators, child care programs, and tens of thousands of young children, families, and communities across Wisconsin. The following is WECA's impact in fiscal year 2024 (Oct. 1, 2023, through Sept. 30, 2024).

Total financial support for early childhood workforce:

\$21,338,022

Early childhood educators served:

90% of Wisconsin's early childhood workforce

34,391 professionals

Child care programs served:

82% of all regulated programs in Wisconsin

3,609 programs

Children reached: 156,991

Advocates: 10,000+

Members: 2,031

Local reach: 72 of 72 counties, all Tribal nations



ENGAGEMENT AND COALITION-BUILDING

WECA is a leader in engagement efforts that support early childhood educators, early childhood programs, and broad coalition building across organizations and sectors in Wisconsin.

Early childhood providers and networks engaged: 21,000+

Parent engagement network connections: 400

Engagement events hosted: 43

Child care program site visits and engagement trainings: 21+

Community conversations and forums: 6

Workshops and conference presentations: 6

I appreciated the ability to speak openly about ... our thoughts and opinions.

-ECE Engagement Forum Attendee



FOOD PROGRAM

The **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** is a federally funded voluntary program that helps partially reimburse for the cost of healthy meals and snacks to qualifying child care facilities. WECA is one of six Wisconsin CACFP sponsors and is eligible to serve family child care programs in all 72 counties and all Tribal nations.

Providers served: 448

Children reached: 3,352

**Meals and snacks provided:
1,447,254**

**Value of reimbursements to
providers: \$2,512,904**



MEMBERSHIP

WECA is the state affiliate of **National Association for the Education Of Young Children (NAEYC)**, the largest professional association of early childhood educators and professionals in the United States.

Total members: 2,031

Week of the Young Child® celebration events: 6

Members registered for NAEYC Public Policy Forum: 57

PRE-LICENSING

WECA began offering **Pre-Licensing** services in the northern and southeastern child care licensing regions in early 2024. It is a required free service for people interested in starting either a licensed family child care or group child care center in Wisconsin. Pre-Licensing Technical Consultants assist individuals from start to finish as they prepare for the licensing process.

Prospective providers: 672

Individuals completing the pre-licensing process: 103

Family child care: 74

Group child care: 29

Hours of direct assistance provided by technical consultants: 691



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

WECA offers extensive professional development and training opportunities and career development counseling services for early childhood educators. Many professional development and training opportunities provide Wisconsin Registry credit.

2024 WECA CONFERENCE

Attendees: **900**

Total professional development hours offered: **45**

Keynote presentations: **3**

Sponsors, exhibitors, and in-kind donors: **35**

Format: **Hybrid** (in-person with virtual engagement opportunities)

Total WECA professional development hours offered*: **246+**

**Includes WECA conference, general WECA training opportunities, and Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESN) offerings.*

REWARD WISCONSIN STIPEND PROGRAM

The REWARD program distributes thousands of direct payments to eligible early childhood educators throughout Wisconsin each year. In fiscal year 2024, it continued to administer a special one-time stipend program for early childhood educators who work in programs in the City of Milwaukee.

Total REWARD Wisconsin Stipend Program stipends awarded: **18,359**

Total REWARD recipients: **11,829**

Total value of stipends awarded:

\$10,213,000

Total City of Milwaukee Early Childhood Workforce stipends awarded: **3,109**

Total city of Milwaukee recipients:

2,531

Total value of City of Milwaukee stipends awarded: **\$1,554,500**



It helped relieve that stress so that I could focus on teaching and be that much more present for my students.

-REWARD Recipient



TEACH EARLY CHILDHOOD® WISCONSIN PROGRAM

TEACH, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2024, provides scholarships to early educators that help credit-based early childhood coursework be nearly free through the Wisconsin Technical College System, University of Wisconsin System, and private and Tribal colleges. WECA offers free Career Development Counseling services to help individuals determine their educational and career pathways in early care and education and serves as a vital partner for institutions of higher education across Wisconsin.

Individuals receiving TEACH scholarships: **1,317**

Children served by TEACH scholars: **41,662**

College credits earned: **10,856**

Total courses completed: **3,856**

Scholars worked in:

546 group centers

126 family child care programs

Average wage increase for center employees who completed contracts: **4.2%**

Average grade point average: **3.46**

Value of technology stipends awarded: **\$356,368**

These kinds of opportunities
allow people to move into
the profession.

-Higher Education Partner

CAREER DEVELOPMENT COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Number of career development counselors: **3**

Career development clients served: **688**

Support for College of Menominee Nation's
Tribal language reclamation efforts:

\$175,000

Total support for technical
college NAEYC

reaccreditation efforts:

\$75,000

Having the support and
help to make decisions
about furthering my education
in my field was very beneficial
to me. I am very pleased with
my experience.

*-Career Development
Counseling Client*



WISCONSIN EARLY EDUCATION SHARED SERVICES NETWORK

WEESN, which celebrated its fifth anniversary in 2024, is a national leader in providing shared resources to help child care programs develop strong business practices that save time, increase revenues, and make their jobs less stressful.

Programs enrolled: **2,335**

Group centers: **1,273**

Family child care programs: **1,062**

Number of children reached: **96,491**

Total coaching hours: **2,865**

Professional development hours offered: **188.5**

FOOD SYSTEMS SUPPORTS

Children served: **25,214**

Participating programs: **573**

Garden tips texting program participants: **257**

Garden tips texting program messages sent: **6,425**

Families participating in Good Food at Home Project: **203+**

Programs participating in Food Care Connection: **387**



I am now a confident owner of my dream business and feel as though I have the proper resources to be successful and be able to continue to provide remarkable services.

-Group Center Director



WITH GRATITUDE: PHILANTHROPY AND DONORS

WECA is a trusted steward of public and private funds that support early care and education advocacy and the early childhood workforce across Wisconsin. Thanks to the ongoing support of generous donors and partners, WECA provides programs and services at little to no cost to an under-resourced early childhood field. We deeply appreciate all who help us advance our vision of child care as a public good.

DONORS

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Bertalot and Bartholow

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Annie's Heirloom Seeds
Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds
Community Shares of Wisconsin
Johnny's Selected Seeds
The Bruce Company
Total Administration Services Corporation (TASC)
Victory Garden Initiative

GRANTING AGENCIES

Alliance for Early Success
American Family Institute for Corporate and Social Impact
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN)
Basic Needs Giving Partnership
Bay Area Workforce Development Board
City of Madison
City of Milwaukee
Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)
First Five Santa Clara County
Greater Milwaukee Foundation
Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation
Hopewell Fund
Madison Community Foundation - A Fund for Women
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
Otto Bremer Trust
Partnership for a Healthier America
Pritzker Children's Initiative
Rock County

Roots & Wings Foundation
Schlecht Family Foundation
Shine Early Learning
Social Development Commission
Waupaca County
Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Wisconsin Partnership Program, UW Madison School of Medicine and Public Health

CONFERENCE SPONSORS

American Family Insurance
Institute for Corporate & Social Responsibility
Celebrate Children Foundation
City of Madison
Civitas Strategies
Community Shares of Wisconsin
Discount School Supply
Early Learning Ventures
First Business Bank
Gundersen Health System
Kaplan Early Learning Company
Partnership for a Healthier America
Pathways Early Autism Intervention
Reach Dane
Shine Early Learning
The Wisconsin Registry
Total Administration Services Corporation (TASC)
UW Health
Vermont State University
We Energies Foundation
Wegner CPAs
Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health
Wisconsin Technical College System

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Concordia University Wisconsin
Cultivate Behavioral Health & Education
Early Childhood Health Consultation
Cindy and Jim Gillett
Grand Canyon University
Hand2Mind, Inc
Help Me Grow Wisconsin
League of Women Voters
Madison College
PBS Wisconsin Education
Prevent Blindness Wisconsin
Satellite Family Child Care System
St. Catherine University
Staff Our Schools
Supporting Families Together Association
The Discovery Source
UW-Platteville
UW-Stout
UW-Whitewater
Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Wisconsin Family Child Care Association

WECA is a leading expert on ECE, and their programs, training, and research have a direct and powerful impact on children, families, and communities in Wisconsin.

-Otto Bremer Trust



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Alex Ysquierdo

**Term ended December 2023*

***Resigned in October 2024*

****Resigned in December 2023*



2024 FINANCIAL REPORT

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, Inc.
Statement of Activities
Year Ended September 30, 2024

	2024	2023
REVENUES		
Federated Campaigns	\$4,332	\$8,015
Government Grants	30,987,007	31,052,610
Individuals, Corporations, Foundations	4,815,419	964,771
Inkinds	1,321	4,982
Recipient and Center Fees	255,356	244,628
Annual Conference	158,622	144,723
Membership	44,245	30,594
Fees for Services	302,844	113,092
Interest	166,998	60,400
Miscellaneous	3,386	9,639
TOTAL REVENUES	\$36,739,530	\$32,633,454
EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$31,861,312	\$31,653,629
Supporting Activities	887,391	860,208
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$32,748,703	\$32,513,837
Change in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	3,739,294	736,608
Change in Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	251,533	(616,991)
Increase (Decrease) in net assets	\$ 3,990,827	\$119,617



STAY CONNECTED

ADVOCATE

Sign up for the **Advocacy Digest and Alerts** e-newsletter to stay in the know about advocacy and policy developments, actions you can take, and more.

INVEST

A donation to WECA of any size is an investment in transforming early care and education in Wisconsin.

JOIN

WECA/NAEYC membership is a connection to professional development and networking, resources, and advocacy opportunities.

FOLLOW

Like and follow WECA on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube!



ENGAGE

Sign up for the **WECA Impact & Influence Updates Newsletter**, a source of highlights about collective progress and opportunities to strengthen early care and education in Wisconsin.

Scan this the code with your smartphone camera to get connected today!



weca

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

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This institution is an equal opportunity provider. Some of WECA's programs and services are funded by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF).