

Recommendations for Governor Evers

Early Childhood Advisory Council 2022 Report

Dear Governor Evers,

As we enter 2023, we do so with immense gratitude for your support of children and families and the investment of federal relief dollars that has provided a lifeline for early care and education programs during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This funding has provided critical resources that have helped over 275,000 children remain in care and 48,000 staff remain employed across the state. These resources have helped to stabilize the field at a time of great uncertainty.

Central to this stability has been the creation of Child Care Counts – a highly successful program providing monthly payments to child care providers to invest in the recruitment, retention, and compensation of staff and to lower child care costs for families. Child Care Counts became a national model for state investment in early care and education and, equally important, Wisconsin now has the infrastructure to continue this important investment moving forward.

The Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) recognizes that the COVID-19 federal relief dollars are temporary and the stability that was described above is at risk of unraveling without continued state investment. That is why the ECAC recommends an investment in the early care and education workforce through Child Care Counts – so that providers can keep their doors open and continue to offer high-quality care, in turn allowing parents and caregivers across the state to remain in the workforce. An investment in Child Care Counts is critical not just to the early care and education field; it is necessary to maintaining the well-being of families, communities, and Wisconsin's economy.

The ECAC also recognizes how the pandemic has heightened infrastructure needs around the health and well-being of families and family supporting services. Therefore, the ECAC recommendations include increased funding for children's mental health; the expansion of family foundations home visiting services; extending Medicaid coverage for postpartum support; and an investment in Family Resource Centers which provide critical services and supports for families and child well-being.

Taken together, these recommendations provide a much-needed investment in the early care and education field, prioritize the health and well-being of families, and recognize the urgency of the forthcoming fiscal cliff that will disrupt the lives of thousands of Wisconsin families if left unaddressed.

These recommendations are aligned with the budget put forward by the Department of Children and Families (DCF); the early education goals and budget requests of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI); Raising Wisconsin goals, the public-private coalition focused on improving the early childhood education system; and continue to build upon the high-impact, evidence-based recommendations made by the ECAC in 2020.

The need for this investment is clear and urgent. We thank you for your consideration of these recommendations that will help to ensure all Wisconsin children and families are healthy, nurtured and thriving.

Sincerely,

Secretary Emilie Amundson (Co-Chair)
State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly (Co-Chair)

Three Investments to Improve Early Care and Education in Wisconsin

Early Childhood Advisory Council 2022 Report



1

Investing in Early Care and Education Workforce through Child Care Counts

Wisconsin's early education providers have faced significant obstacles during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet continue to provide high-quality care for families, due, in part, to the investment of federal COVID-19 relief funding known as Child Care Counts. The ECAC recommends the Governor dedicate \$300 million in the biennial state budget to support recruitment and retention of early childhood educators to maintain and expand access to high-quality early education programs, and avoid a "fiscal cliff" that would have devastating effects and likely lead to educator shortages, fewer available classrooms, closed child care centers, and more families without access to high-quality care and unable to participate in the workforce.



2

Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Families

The ECAC recommends investing \$18.79 million in a health and well-being package that includes greater access to early mental health supports for children and coaching for caregivers, as well as funding to expand Family Foundations Home Visiting programs that provide critical parent and family resources. Further, we recommend advocating for extending Medicaid coverage for postpartum care from the current 90-day policy to twelve months after birth to ensure birthing parents have stable access to high-quality care.



3

Expanding Access to Family Support Services through Family Resource Centers

The ECAC recommends an investment of \$5 million to support the expansion of Family Resource Centers throughout the state that offer programs and services which reduce risk factors for child abuse and neglect and improve outcomes such as school readiness and child well-being.

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 Care and Education Workforce through Child Care Counts



“[Child Care Counts] has allowed me and continues to allow me to keep my doors open. Without it, we would have to close, and more than likely permanently.”
~child care provider

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. These workforce challenges have been compounded during the COVID-19 pandemic, as early education providers faced significant obstacles to remain open and provide high-quality care for families.

Wisconsin’s creation of Child Care Counts has provided crucial support to early education providers. This temporary federal investment has provided financial stability for providers to stay open, recruit, and retain qualified staff. However, with this investment set to end in January 2024, a state investment is urgently needed. We recommend the Governor dedicate \$300 million in the biennial state budget to support recruitment and retention of early childhood educators to maintain and expand access to high-quality early education programs and avoid a “fiscal cliff” that would have devastating effects and likely lead to educator shortages, fewer available classrooms, closed child care centers, more families without access to high-quality care, and employers and the economy facing the ripple effects of child care shortages.

Evidence-Based

The significant return on investment from quality early childhood programs has been widely researched and established.² Studies have shown that high-quality early childhood programs “deliver a 13% per year return on investment” and create positive, long-term effects for families, including on “maternal education, labor force participation, and parental income.”³ Therefore, investing in early care and education programs delivers impressive, two-generational economic impacts in addition to the essential support of early childhood brain development that occurs during this time as well.⁴

High-Impact

Pre-pandemic, the early care and education workforce struggled to recruit and retain qualified staff. With teacher and assistant teacher annual turnover averages at 30% and 45% respectively, and with compensation ranges between \$10 and \$13 per hour, the early care and education workforce was already in crisis.⁵ The pandemic compounded these dynamics by further destabilizing classrooms and care centers across the state.⁶ Without federal relief funding many family care and center-based child care providers were at risk of closing. In fact, national surveys indicated that “more than 90 percent of center-based and family child care providers who received stabilization grants said the funding helped their programs stay open.”⁷ In Wisconsin, Child Care Counts had tremendous impacts – helping over 275,000 children remain in care and 48,000 staff to remain employed at over 4,000 child care providers across the state.

Smart Investment

Investing in the early care and education workforce will ensure continued stability and support for child care providers across the state, thereby ensuring that families have access to the high-quality care they need to thrive. High-quality care has been demonstrated to generate a 13% return on investment and creates “better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment.”⁸ With federal relief funding set to expire – and a majority of providers estimating the end of relief funding would negatively impact their programs – the state’s investment in the early care and education workforce is urgently needed and would have tremendous impacts on children, families, and the Wisconsin economy.⁹

SMART INVESTMENT 2:

Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Families

The ECAC recommends investing in a health and well-being package that includes greater access to early mental health supports for children and coaching for caregivers, as well as funding to expand Family Foundations Home Visiting programs that provide critical parent and family resources. Further, we recommend advocating for extending Medicaid coverage for postpartum care from the current 90-day policy to twelve months after birth to ensure birthing parents have stable access to high-quality care.¹⁰

Evidence-Based

Pre-pandemic, infant and child mental health faced stark challenges, with preschool expulsion rates more than three times the rate of students in kindergarten through 12th grade.¹¹ Coupled with the widespread increase in mental health crises for children, youth, and adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for additional investments in infant and early child mental health remains an urgent priority. Studies show that incorporating social and emotional development training reduces challenging behaviors and strengthens early education programs by providing educators with the training and tools to improve child-adult relationships, identify concerns early, promote racial equity by addressing implicit biases, and reducing staff turnover.¹²

Family Foundations Home Visiting also provides essential parent and family resources such as prenatal care, postpartum care, and health services to counties and tribes across Wisconsin and utilizes national, evidence-based models that meet U.S. Department of Health and Human Services criteria.¹³

Medicaid funding currently supports approximately 50% of all births in the U.S. and more than 40% of births in Wisconsin.¹⁴ However, many pregnant people lose coverage after 90-days postpartum due to changes in eligibility criteria.¹⁵ Extending Medicaid coverage to twelve months postpartum is an immediate opportunity to increase coverage stability and mitigate racial disparities in maternal and child health outcomes that are of particular concern.¹⁶

High-Impact

The first five years of life are a critical time of rapid brain development, when children particularly need stable and consistent caregiving and access to quality health services. Benefits include:

High-quality child 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

High-quality health services: Expanding Family Foundations Home Visiting and extending Medicaid postpartum coverage helps to ensure all Wisconsin families will have greater access to high-quality health services, supports, and resources to ensure positive maternal and child health outcomes.

Smart Investment

Investing in the above package of supports will decrease suspension and expulsions and provide greater access, stability, and supports to the health and well-being of families, especially during the first year postpartum. These investments will have far-reaching, positive impacts on child development in communities throughout Wisconsin.



“Sound mental health provides an essential foundation of stability that supports all other aspects of human development—from the formation of friendships and the ability to cope with adversity to the achievement of success in school, work, and community life.”¹⁸

SMART INVESTMENT 3:

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, improve outcomes such as school readiness and child well-being, and provide referrals to families for more targeted services and supports. 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, as well as increasing those investments to make the services of FRCs available to more families throughout Wisconsin. Further, there may be a partnership that could be strengthened and better aligned between FRCs and the Department of Public Instruction's Out-of-School Time (OST) programs to ensure families are connected to services through FRCs as a "no wrong door" approach.



"FRCs meet families where they are, help them build on their strengths, and connect them to resources so that they can sustainably meet their needs. There is evidence that FRCs generate economic returns to the community."²⁵

Evidence-Based

FRCs offer critical services such as parenting education and home visiting, child development activities, and support with referrals to services and resources that are universally available and some that are targeted to families experiencing specific risk factors. Studies have demonstrated significant impacts due to the inclusion of family resource centers in communities. For example, research completed in Teller County, CO demonstrated a 63% reduction in its child abuse and neglect rate.¹⁹ Additional research in Allegheny County, PA determined that neighborhoods with FRCs had a 26% lower rate of child abuse and neglect investigations compared to similar neighborhoods without them,²⁰ and San Francisco, CA saw a reduction in foster care placements over time by 52% since a strong network of FRCs was established.²¹

High-Impact

In addition to reductions in child maltreatment, benefits of FRCs 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. One study demonstrated "statistically significant improvements in economic self-sufficiency, health, concrete support in times of need, social support, family functioning and resiliency, and caregiver-child nurturing and attachment."²² This speaks to the depth of resources, importance, and multi-generational impacts FRCs have on children's and families' lives.

Smart Investment

Research has shown that high-quality FRCs have a return of up to \$4.93 for every dollar invested²³ and provide million-dollar savings in child welfare systems due to reductions in abuse and maltreatment cases.²⁴

Endnotes

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