

Wisconsin's Preschool Development Grant

Birth to 5

2021 Needs Assessment





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	6
Background	16
Introduction	17
I. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS	19
II. FOCAL POPULATIONS: CHILDREN WHO ARE VULNERABLE OR UNDERSERVED	24
III. NUMBER OF CHILDREN BEING SERVED AND AWAITING SERVICES	55
IV. ECE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY	64
V. GAPS IN DATA OR RESEARCH TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION	81
VI. QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF B-5 ECSS PROGRAMS/SUPPORTS	84
VII. MEASURABLE INDICATORS OF PROGRESS ALIGNED TO WISCONSIN'S VISION/OUTCOMES	92
VIII. ISSUES INVOLVING ECE FACILITIES	98
IX. OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREATER RESOURCE EFFICIENCY	100
X. TRANSITION SUPPORTS AND GAPS	106
XI. SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION	111
Conclusion	118
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Wisconsin Counties Rural to Urban by USDA 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Code	119
Appendix B: Map of Wisconsin's Counties	121

This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90TP007601 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.



Table of Figures

FIGURE A: The Wisconsin Preschool Development Grant Framework	19
FIGURE B: Percent of Children living in households below a poverty threshold	28
FIGURE C: School-Aged Child Poverty in Wisconsin, 2019 by County	28
FIGURE D: Children under age 18 Living in Poverty	29
FIGURE E: Wisconsin Refugees by County (Fiscal Years 2016–2020)	31
FIGURE F: Wisconsin Family Median Family Income	34
FIGURE G: Families with Adults and Children	39
FIGURE H: Children in Out-of-Home Care by Age Range, December 31, 2019	41
FIGURE I: Age Range of Unique Child Maltreatment Victims	42
FIGURE J: Victim and Wisconsin Child Population by Race Comparison	43
FIGURE K: Wisconsin Rural-Urban Commuting Codes, 2010	48
FIGURE L: Urbanized areas, urbanized clusters and non-urban areas, US Census Bureau definition, 2010	49
FIGURE M: Projected Change in Number of Children 0 to age 19 by County	51
FIGURE N: Percent change in Population ages 0 to 17 years between 2010 and 2015	52
FIGURE O: Wisconsin's Child Care Deserts as of February 2020	70
FIGURE P: DCF Division of Early Care and Education (DECE) Grant Crosswalk	83



Table of Tables

TABLE 1: Stakeholder Engagement in Wisconsin's B-5 Vision	7
TABLE 2: State Leadership Engaged in 2020 Needs Assessment Development	9
TABLE 3: 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary Research & Outreach	10
TABLE 4: 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary Indicator Data Examples	12
TABLE 5: Summary of Initial 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Findings	13
TABLE 6: Addressing Data Gaps in PDG-R	14
TABLE 7: Wisconsin PDG Framework Definitions	20
TABLE 8: Addressing Differing Definitions of 'Rural'	22
TABLE 9: Race/Ethnicity of Wisconsin Children Under the Age of 5 (2019)	25
TABLE 10: Children Under the Age of 5 by Tribal Area in Wisconsin	26
TABLE 11: Percent of Children under the age of 18 in Wisconsin Living in Poverty by FPL	29
TABLE 12: Wisconsin DLL Population under the Age of 9 by Age Group, 2011–2015	32
TABLE 13: Wisconsin DLL Population under the Age of 9 by Race/Ethnicity, 2011–2015	32
TABLE 14: Subgroups of Children/Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Wisconsin	40
TABLE 15: Wisconsin Population in 2019	46
TABLE 16: Wisconsin Counties with the Greatest Percent Population Decline 2010–2040	50
TABLE 17: Overview of Wisconsin ECE Programs	55
TABLE 18: Distinct Count of Children B-5 ECIDS Cross-Agency Data Element Description	59
TABLE 19: Percent of YoungStar Program Participation by Region (March 2021)	65
TABLE 20: Count of YoungStar Program Participation by Region (March 2021)	65
TABLE 21: Percent of Wisconsin Shares Participation by YoungStar Rating (March 2021)	66
TABLE 22: Count of Wisconsin Shares Participation by YoungStar Rating (March 2021)	66



Table of Tables (Continued)

TABLE 23: 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary SWOT Analysis: Opportunities	80
TABLE 24: 2021-23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan Summary	93
TABLE 25: Preliminary Outcomes Identified in Wisconsin's PDG Logic Model	95
TABLE 26: Examples of Regional Variations in ECE Service Delivery	100
TABLE 27: YoungStar Partnerships as of 3/31/2021	102
TABLE 28: PDG-R Family Engagement Activities	108
TABLE 29: Overview of Planned Interagency Cooperative on Early Years (ICEY)	115



The Preschool Development Grant Birth to 5 (PDG) is a one-year federal grant administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and additional partners. PDG is Wisconsin's opportunity to "connect the dots" across the early care and education (ECE) field. Wisconsin's needs assessment addresses challenges, barriers, and opportunities to create a more comprehensive Birth to 5 (B-5) Early Childhood State System (ECSS) by using multiple data sources including:

- other relevant needs assessments;
- data collected through activities funded under PDG;
- a review of ECE qualitative and quantitative data;
- comprehensive listening sessions of state, regional, and local stakeholders; and
- community interviews performed with providers and caregivers.

Wisconsin's Vision

Wisconsin's PDG Vision: By 2023, all Wisconsin families will have access to high-quality, affordable, local ECE opportunities that meet their needs and prepare all of Wisconsin's youngest children to succeed and thrive.

Wisconsin's Commitment to Equity and Inclusion: Wisconsin places an unwavering emphasis on equity and inclusion as a central requirement for accomplishing its overall vision. As established in its 2021–23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan, Wisconsin pursues the following goals in all its work:

- All Wisconsin children will be safe and loved members of thriving families and communities.
- All Wisconsin early care and education professionals will engage in equitable, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices.
- Wisconsin will actively work to undo systemic discriminatory practices that negatively impact children, families, and early care and education professionals based on their identities (including race, ethnicity, and gender) or abilities.
- Collaboration and advocacy at the state, regional, local, and tribal levels will help to overcome all barriers to equity and inclusion.

All stakeholders across Wisconsin's B-5 ECSS have a role in achieving this vision. In its 2019 PDG application, Wisconsin outlined how each group of stakeholders can help achieve the state's vision and help all children succeed and thrive: Table 1.



TABLE 1: Stakeholder Engagement in Wisconsin's B-5 Vision

ECE Stakeholder	Wisconsin's B-5 Vision by 2023
Children	All children, especially children of color, children experiencing poverty, children with disabilities, multilingual learners, children in rural areas, and other vulnerable or underserved populations, have equitable access to a high-quality, locally-based system of robust ECE services that support their well-being and prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond.
Families and Caregivers	All Wisconsin parents and caregivers have access to high-quality, affordable, culturally and linguistically responsive choices for ECE services that meet their family's needs. Families and caregivers are empowered decision-makers and informed, engaged stakeholders that understand early childhood development and services to support their success.
ECE Teachers and Providers	Wisconsin's ECE teachers are paid competitive wages and benefits; supported with ongoing, culturally and linguistically appropriate, high-quality professional development opportunities; and have career ladder opportunities that promote professional growth. Program leaders and training and technical assistance (TTA) providers understand and promote equity in service delivery; drive knowledge and skill development in critical areas (e.g., mental health, social emotional learning, trauma-informed care); have effective strategies to recruit, retain, and support high-quality staff; and are meaningfully engaged in collaborative efforts to improve child outcomes.
Wisconsin Communities	All local communities, with the support of regional and state partners, have an interconnected ECE network that fully integrates health, nutrition, education, and other publicly funded services that support children's well-being and success.
Wisconsin Regions	All regions in Wisconsin establish and/or strengthen existing structures to fully support local ECE systems, maximize resources and economies of scale, and engage regional ECE partners, K-12, higher education, health, housing, workforce development, and others in identifying, addressing, and meeting the needs of all children in the region.
State of Wisconsin	The state has a coherent, collaborative, and integrated B-5 ECSS that engages current stakeholders while building new champions; provides statewide infrastructure and support, including high-quality data, guidance, and professional development; and targets resources and support to Wisconsin's most vulnerable or underserved populations.



2020 Needs Assessment Development Process

Wisconsin's 2020 Needs Assessment was developed in partnership with several key stakeholders. The 2020 Needs Assessment utilized ECE indicators specific to B-5 programs, child care, Head Start, and 4K/4K Community Approach, along with key health, employment, education, and poverty data. In addition, 17 listening sessions (both in-person and virtual) were held to gather ideas on challenges impacting families of children B-5, ECE program staff, and communities. This included two tribal listening sessions and one listening session conducted in Spanish. At least 600 unique participants attended the listening sessions, mostly in their professional capacity. Finally, 63 qualitative interviews were conducted with primary caregivers and child care providers from five demographic populations in Wisconsin—Hmong, Latinx, tribal, black, and rural white. A summary of the initial 2020 Needs Assessment findings can be found in [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary \(October 2020\)](#).

Stakeholder Engagement in the Needs Assessment

In late 2019, as part of the PDG development process, the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) developed its PDG vision:

By 2023, all Wisconsin families will have access to high-quality, affordable, local ECE opportunities that meet their needs and prepare all of Wisconsin's youngest children to succeed and thrive.

Further, the group provided guidance on key goals, identified vulnerable/priority populations, and identified other relevant needs assessments and data for review and inclusion in the 2020 Needs Assessment. The ECAC workgroups (which typically meets on a quarterly basis) met almost monthly in 2020 to advance PDG needs assessment, strategic planning, and related work, and used the needs assessment efforts to help drive its 2021–23 biennial budget recommendations to the Governor. Additional information about Wisconsin's ECAC can be found on the [council's webpage](#).

In February 2020, Wisconsin also convened the Governor's Leadership Council on Early Years (LCEY), a first-of-its-kind group in Wisconsin that functions like a children's cabinet. First proposed in Wisconsin's successful PDG application, LCEY includes the Governor, First Lady, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, DCF Secretary, and other Secretaries and Executive Directors of Wisconsin state agencies. Its work impacts children B-5 and their families, including health, mental health, nutrition, social services, early intervention, and special education, as well as workforce and economic development. LCEY's primary goal is to accelerate ECSS strategic connections and systems alignment. With respect to the 2020 Needs Assessment, as a membership body that includes the Governor and state agency executives, LCEY ensured that high-level guidance was provided in the PDG needs assessment and strategic planning work. Additional information about LCEY, including its full membership, can be found on [LCEY's webpage](#).

To ensure that B-5 ECSS stakeholders worked in tandem toward the same goals and objectives, Wisconsin also aligned its PDG work with the work of the Wisconsin Infant Toddler Policy Project (WITPP), a Pritzker Children's Initiative-funded coalition of state and community advocates, state agency and program leaders. The vision of the WITPP is to ensure "every low-income family with an infant and/or toddler will have equitable access



to affordable, high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive early care and education that meets their family and employment needs and supports optimal child development and wellbeing. The early childhood education workforce will have the skills, training, and support to deliver high-quality care and education with commensurate compensation.” (Source: [WITPP](#))

Table 2 provides additional details about the state-level leadership efforts around the 2020 Needs Assessment.

TABLE 2: State Leadership Engaged in 2020 Needs Assessment Development

<p>The Leadership Council on Early Years (LCEY)</p>	<p>LCEY was established in PDG and includes the Governor, First Lady, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, DCF Secretary, and other Secretaries and Executive Directors of WI state agencies whose work impacts children B-5 and their families. This work includes health, mental health, nutrition, social services, early intervention, and special education, as well as workforce and economic development. LCEY, which functions like a children’s cabinet, accelerates ECSS strategic connections and systems alignment.</p>
<p>Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC)</p>	<p>ECAC is Wisconsin’s federally-required State Advisory Council that includes multi-sector, public/private stakeholders and develops specific policy/budget recommendations and guidance to the Governor. The ECAC developed definitions and strategic priorities for the PDG throughout 2019, met in 2020 to engage in needs assessment work, as well as planning and policy development aligned with PDG. Their recommendations are incorporated in the 2020 Needs Assessment.</p>
<p>DCF - PDG lead agency DPI - PDG lead partner DHS - PDG partner</p>	<p>As the lead PDG agencies, multiple key staff and division leaders in DCF and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) provided feedback and revisions to the draft 2020 Needs Assessment. They include research and data professionals, policy and program staff, content experts including 4K (Wisconsin’s state-funded pre-k program), child care, home visiting, as well as human resources (HR), procurement, budget and finance. Department of Health Services (DHS) program staff from Birth to Three Program (B3P) contributed as well.</p>
<p>Statewide Leadership Team (SLT)</p>	<p>The SLT was established to coordinate regional PDG implementation. It includes multi-sector, public/private partners. The SLT provided feedback into the 2020 Needs Assessment, facilitated participation in listening and feedback sessions from a diverse set of stakeholders, and reviewed drafts.</p>
<p>PDG Regional Workgroups</p>	<p>Led by the SLT, these workgroups include regional staff and partners who work with local ECE programs. These regional workgroups helped facilitate listening sessions and provided feedback on drafts.</p>



In addition to the involvement of stakeholders in these state-level leadership efforts, Wisconsin engaged in extensive quantitative and qualitative research, outreach, listening sessions, and stakeholder engagement efforts to address and analyze key questions about access, affordability, quality, and workforce within a framework of equity and inclusion. These activities are outlined in Table 3 below. Further information summarizing the listening sessions and community interviews can be found in the [Preschool Development Grant Voices from Wisconsin’s Early Care and Education Stakeholders: Listening Session Report \(October 2020\)](#) and [Preschool Development Grant Qualitative Interviews \(December 2020\)](#).

TABLE 3: 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary Research & Outreach

<p>Quantitative Data and Research</p>	<p>Wisconsin consulted a wide body of quantitative data and research. Sources included DCF, DPI, DHS data and research, Wisconsin Head Start Association data, 2018 United Way ALICE report, 2020 County Health rankings, labor force data, market rate survey data, CDC National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief, Health Affairs (Vol. 33, No 8), Trends in Black-White Life Expectancy, DHS Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Baseline Health Disparities Report, and other available research and data.</p>
<p>Qualitative B-5 ECSS Stakeholder Listening Sessions (LS) (Feb–Aug 2020)</p>	<p>Wisconsin engaged B-5 ECSS stakeholders including parents and primary caregivers, Tribal leaders, government and community leaders, ECE professionals (child care/4K/Head Start) and related service organizations (including those serving health, mental health, and special education). The goal was to gather their perspectives and ideas on challenges, solutions, and issues impacting families of children B-5, ECE programs, and communities. A total of 17 listening sessions were held: four in-person community sessions (pre-COVID-19); 10 virtual regional sessions; two virtual Tribal sessions; and one virtual session conducted in Spanish. At least 600 unique participants attended these listening sessions, mostly in their professional capacity.</p>
<p>Qualitative State Agency/ Executive Engagement in Listening Sessions</p>	<p>Many state leaders participated in and provided introductory remarks to these listening sessions, including DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson, and Secretaries or Executive Directors of the Departments of Workforce Development (DWD), Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB), and Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). Tribal listening sessions also included the DCF Secretary, Oneida Nation Chairman Tehassi Hill, and representatives from the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC). Several state legislators also participated.</p>



Focused Interviews with Parents, Families and Child Care Providers (Aug–Sept 2020)	University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies interviewed 63 primary caregivers and child care providers representing black, Hmong, Latinx, tribal, and rural populations. Interviewees were located across Wisconsin and were asked similar questions to those asked at the listening sessions. Interviewers had similar racial, ethnic and/or language backgrounds to their interviewed populations. Feedback from these qualitative interviews was used to provide the 2020 Needs Assessment with a regional, community, and family context.
Qualitative Business Community Outreach	Wisconsin engaged in extensive outreach to its business community through existing stakeholder venues (e.g., Governor’s Council on Workforce Investment, Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity); local chambers of commerce, and other business venues to build knowledge and understanding. This outreach helped the 2020 Needs Assessment focus on strengthening the child care workforce, and led to the creation of specific guidance for Wisconsin businesses about how they can support local ECE.

Key Indicators and Populations Addressed

To develop a holistic picture of the needs of children and families across the ECSS, Wisconsin examined key background data and indicators on the overall wellbeing of communities in the areas of health, employment, poverty, and education. Racial, ethnic, geographic (e.g., county), and socio-economic disparities exist across all indicators. These indicators raise underlying issues impacting communities, including access to or utilization of services, such as health care or WIC, and availability of or access to higher paying jobs that would indicate a greater ability to afford child care. Examples of these indicators are included in Table 4 below. Wisconsin will continue to dig deeper into these significant disparities, as well as the drivers of these inequities, including the impact of structural and systemic racism, that exist within the ECE and B-5 ECSS in its comprehensive needs assessment.

More detailed data snapshots are included in the initial 2020 [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#). Further, PDG resources were used to build an online “[PDG Sandbox](#),” where policymakers and the public can examine critical data indicators by region and county. Examples of indicator data used are included in Table 4 below:



TABLE 4: 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary Indicator Data Examples

Health	Health Insurance	6% of Wisconsin adults under 65 do not have health insurance. (Source: 2020 County Health Rankings)
	Vaccination Rates	72% of all children 19–35 months are fully vaccinated, but immunization rates in many counties are substantially lower. (Source: 2020 County Health Rankings)
	Infant Mortality	The death rate for infants born to black mothers is the highest in the nation. Large inequities in poor birth outcomes by race or ethnicity and education persist. Statewide, about 1 out of every 10 births is born premature, but prematurity occurs more frequently for black mothers (1 out of every 7 births). The rate of neonatal deaths due to preterm birth is 27% higher in Wisconsin than the nation as a whole. (Source: DHS)
Employment	Unemployment Rate	Prior to COVID-19, WI had a low average unemployment rate (3%). (Source: DWD)
	Asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE)	However, 38% of Wisconsin residents earning above the federal poverty line struggled to afford basic needs (housing, food, child care, transportation). (Source: ALICE)
Poverty	Child poverty rates	The percent of children living in poverty varies drastically by race/ethnicity (8% for white children; 25% for Hispanic children; 36% for black children). (Source: National Kids Count)
Education	4th Grade Reading Assessment	Wisconsin has the widest black/white achievement gap in the country. (Source: 2019 NAEP 4th grade reading)
	High School Completion	92% of WI 9th graders graduate high school in 4 years, however some counties see much lower graduation rate. Milwaukee County’s graduation rate is 77%. (Source: 2020 County Health Rankings)

2020 Initial Needs Assessment Findings

For purposes of its initial 2020 work and based on stakeholder feedback, Wisconsin identified the areas of workforce, access, affordability, and quality as a framework for evaluating and transforming ECE in Wisconsin within the context of equity and inclusion. In 2020, workforce was identified as the top priority, as the success of all other framework areas depends on Wisconsin’s ability to support and maintain its ECE workforce. Table 5 summarizes the initial 2020 Needs Assessment findings. As detailed below, these findings currently have a



specific and intentional focus on regulated child care, and it is recognized that additional work will be done to integrate and align the full ECSS.

TABLE 5: Summary of Initial 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Findings

Workforce	Wisconsin's ECE workforce is lacking professional respect, adequate pay, benefits, and diversity. ECE programs are unable to retain their best workers. Members of the workforce seek opportunities to meaningfully connect with one another, receive coaching/mentorships, peer-to-peer support, and professional learning engagement and opportunities.
Access	Wisconsin families struggle to access ECE, particularly in child care deserts, predominantly located in rural areas. Greater access to care is needed for infants, toddlers, during non-standard hours, and for children with special needs. Further, while nearly all school districts offer four-year-old kindergarten (4K) programs, most of those programs are offered only half day, leaving parents to find wrap-around care or other alternatives.
Affordability	Some Wisconsin families cannot afford ECE. This is especially true for single-parent families and families of color. Families who qualify for Wisconsin Shares, the state's child care subsidy, often experience additional barriers to accessing ECE and are unable to take advantage of additional supports. The cost of providing quality care far exceeds families' ability to pay.
Quality	Quality ECE exists in Wisconsin, but some families may not be able to access or afford it. Families, communities, and other ECE stakeholders have varying perceptions of quality. ECE stakeholders expressed a need to systematically address quality, inclusion, trauma, mental health, social-emotional learning, family engagement, and other best practices to support quality ECE programs.
*Note about COVID-19 Impact	Wisconsin leaders rallied behind ECE during the health emergency with legislators approving \$51 million and the Governor allocating \$81 million for a total of \$131 million in CARES Act funding to support ECE providers and the workforce. Ongoing efforts will be needed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, which continues to exacerbate existing challenges.

Further, it is well documented that Wisconsin has some of the largest access, opportunity, and academic achievement gaps between white and black children in the country, and significant gaps persist for other vulnerable or underserved populations of children, as well. The 2020 [Needs Assessment Summary](#) and this report support this observation.

Given substantial research demonstrating that children of color and children experiencing poverty often enter kindergarten significantly behind their peers, and that those early gaps persist throughout a student's



academic career, many Wisconsin leaders have acknowledged that investing in early childhood is one of the best investments the state can make. Moreover, placing equity and inclusion at the forefront of efforts to support Wisconsin’s ECE programs and its B-5 ECSS is a fundamental state strategy to advance the healthy development and wellbeing of all of Wisconsin’s youngest residents and their families. (Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG](#) and [PDG-R Applications](#), 2019 and 2020)

Looking Ahead: Building Wisconsin’s 2022 Comprehensive Needs Assessment

With support from its successful PDG Renewal Grant (PDG-R), awarded in late 2020, Wisconsin will continue to expand on its initial needs assessment work to address domains and questions that it was unable to address in 2020. For example, the 2020 [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#) and the 2021–23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan focus on child care. This strategy was intentional, as stakeholders and leaders identified stabilization of Wisconsin’s child care system and child care workforce as urgent statewide priorities, especially in the wake of COVID-19. Moving forward, Wisconsin will substantially broaden its agenda to examine data across ECE and the B-5 ECSS and analyze a wide spectrum of needs and issues, such as health, education, food insecurity, and stable housing, that contribute to the healthy development and success of young children in the state. A more comprehensive needs assessment will be published in 2022 that incorporates these additional elements.

For example (as described in its successful PDG-R application), Wisconsin plans to conduct additional stakeholder engagement in 2021 and 2022, as COVID-19 limited the state’s initial reach in 2020. Further, Wisconsin plans to address data gaps as part of the 2022 Needs Assessment as shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6: Addressing Data Gaps in PDG-R

Parent/Family Voice	In PDG-R, Wisconsin is placing a strong emphasis on parent/family voice through effective feedback loops, Parent Advisory Councils (PAC), and surveys. PDG-R funds will support engagement with vulnerable or underserved populations where COVID-19 limited reach in PDG.
Accessing Other Relevant Needs Assessments	Wisconsin will review other completed needs assessments from other program areas, including the Family Foundations Home Visiting Program (FFHV), Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Head Start Collaboration Office, Division of Safety and Permanence Prevention Scan Assessments. These data will be included as they become available in future iterations of the Needs Assessment.
ECE Workforce Surveys	Development and administration of ECE workforce surveys focused on needs and critical issues facing ECE providers (e.g., career paths, job satisfaction, retention). These activities will be completed by August 2021.
Health and Wellness Representation	Under PDG-R, Wisconsin plans to place a greater emphasis on health, mental health, nutrition, early intervention, and other needs of the B-5 population, due to the fact that COVID-19 impacted PDG participation and reach in its 2022 Needs Assessment.



Unduplicated Count Receiving/ Awaiting Services	Wisconsin is advancing plans to complete this work and finalize a cross-agency data sharing agreement. Secured funding will allow for needed resources.
Structural and Systemic Racism	Wisconsin will address gaps in data that highlight where and what structural racism exists within and across our ECSS.

Wisconsin will also continue to refine its indicators, definitions, and provide deeper analysis of several key areas as part of its PDG-R needs assessment work, including:

- Populations of children who are vulnerable or underserved and children in rural areas, including children from sovereign Tribal Nations;
- Key concerns/issues related to ECE facilities, such as needed updates, safety concerns, etc.;
- Transition supports/gaps between ECE programs and school entry, including the need to share data as children move from ECE into the early grades;
- A deeper understanding of structural and systemic racism.

Starting with the 2022 update, future iterations of Wisconsin’s B-5 Needs Assessment will more comprehensively address the B-5 ECSS and further reflect the spectrum of needs of children B-5 and their families (including health, mental health, early intervention, school readiness, and more). Going forward, Wisconsin will also make a more concerted effort to engage families directly to ensure that state and local policymakers and providers are learning from the wealth and diversity of knowledge, strengths, and perspectives that families bring to the table. Wisconsin will continue to periodically update its B-5 Needs Assessment to incorporate new data, related needs assessments, ongoing research, and other pertinent information to help inform updated strategic planning efforts. These further iterations will reflect alignment to the state’s Head Start Collaboration Office needs assessments and goal setting efforts that are also aligned to and informed by the state’s strategic plan. Ultimately, Wisconsin aims to adopt an ongoing biennial schedule for updating its needs assessment—and its related strategic plan—so as to fully align with Wisconsin’s biennial state budget process. This alignment will help ensure that state early childhood leaders and advocates are unified around a common, comprehensive B-5 ECSS strategic agenda, and allow state agencies who oversee ECE and related programs to advance budget recommendations in line with that shared agenda.



Wisconsin's initial [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#), was funded through Wisconsin's successful federal Birth to 5 (B-5) Preschool Development Grant (PDG), awarded in December 2019. Published in October 2020 and described in detail throughout this document, the initial 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary consists of research, analysis, and stakeholder engagement that provide an initial look into the strengths and opportunities, as well as barriers and challenges, within Wisconsin's Early Care and Education (ECE) programs and services. Wisconsin leaders utilized this initial 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary to develop its initial 2021–23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan.

This document provides further background, research, and context to the information presented in the 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary, and addresses each domain identified within [federal guidance](#) from the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Further, as part of its B-5 PDG Renewal grant (PDG-R), awarded in December 2020, Wisconsin is partnering with researchers within the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty to substantially expand its needs assessment work in order to address new domains and questions across Wisconsin's B-5 ECSS. This document will serve as a template and starting place for those efforts, in line with federal guidance. An updated, comprehensive B-5 ECSS Needs Assessment will be prepared for publication in 2022 to support development of the Statewide B-5 Strategic Plan for 2023–25.



Home to the country's first kindergarten and a state constitution that champions early education, Wisconsin's commitment to Early Care and Education (ECE) is as old as the state itself. While Wisconsin has many strong ECE programs, partnerships, and innovative cross-sector collaborations supporting its youngest citizens, significant challenges remain. Stakeholders across Wisconsin's Birth to 5 (B-5) Early Childhood State System (ECSS) recognize that more must be done to reach and effectively support all vulnerable or underserved children and families—including those in rural areas—across the state.

Under the leadership and vision of Wisconsin's Governor Tony Evers, an educator with a lifetime of child-focused expertise and experience, Wisconsin is uniquely positioned to make meaningful and lasting improvements to its B-5 ECSS. Wisconsin's initial one-year Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG) served as a catalyst to mobilize stakeholders, build new allies, engage in a thorough needs assessment, and develop a strategic plan. Going forward, through its PDG B-5 three year renewal grant (PDG-R) and more, Wisconsin is continuing to develop a comprehensive road map to further connect and expand services and support for the state's youngest, most vulnerable or underserved children and families.

For example, Wisconsin has expanded its coalition of powerful policymakers and influencers who understand the interconnection between ECE and Wisconsin's economy, and are advocates for a strong and robust B-5 ECSS. Through coordinated leadership bodies such as:

- the Governor's Leadership Council on Early Years (LCEY), created as part of PDG and which functions as a children's cabinet of state agency executives;
- the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC)—Wisconsin's State Advisory Council;
- the Pritzker Children's Initiative-funded Wisconsin Infant Toddler Policy Project (WITPP)

Wisconsin has cultivated new ECE champions and allies to help address key challenges identified in this needs assessment—including child care access and workforce issues. Moreover, in April 2021, Wisconsin elected a new State Superintendent of Public Instruction—an educator who has explicitly made investing in early childhood one of her four main policy priorities.

Further, thanks to Wisconsin's leadership in prioritizing early care and education, Wisconsin has been well-positioned to prioritize ECE in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the support of the LCEY and ECAC, the Wisconsin Legislature approved \$51 million, and Governor Evers allocated \$81 million for a total of \$131 million of its Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding toward ECE in 2020. Wisconsin has one of the highest rates of CARES Act funding invested in ECE in the country. These funds were pivotal in stabilizing the state's child care programs and workforce. They also ensured more families have a safe place to send their children so they can stay employed. In March 2020, roughly 40% of program locations had temporarily closed. Thanks to these investments and the broad coalition of support behind them, Wisconsin has experienced a 2% increase in the number of regulated child care since March 2020. Similarly, the groundwork laid by Wisconsin's leadership—including its Wisconsin's PDG and PDG-R efforts—ensured that Wisconsin is in a place of strength and can maximize the \$589 million in federal funding awarded to the state as part of 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), including child care stabilization grants and additional Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) funding.



Going forward, Wisconsin will continue to leverage the strong, interconnected partnerships it has built to strengthen Wisconsin's families, communities, workforce, and economy. Wisconsin's 2020 Needs Assessment Summary and 2021–23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan focused stakeholder efforts around equity, inclusion, access, affordability, and quality, as well as bolstering the ECE workforce. Under PDG-R, Wisconsin is building on this groundwork in multiple ways, including:

- An explicit focus on supporting the ECE workforce with new local Workforce Grants and an expansion of multi-sector Community Innovation Grants (CIGs);
- Efforts to expand parental knowledge about ECE options available to them—including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and B services;
- Strengthening and enhancing partnerships across all ECE programs, including Head Start and early childhood programs offered in Wisconsin's schools like four-year-old kindergarten;
- Creation of a new Equity Advisory Council (EAC) focused on strengthening family and provider feedback loops to ensure WI's ECE system is more equitable and family-centered;
- Bolstering evidence-based best practices to support the ECE workforce by
 - expanding cross-sector professional development opportunities focused on trauma and inclusion and with a practice-based coaching emphasis;
 - funding a new Workforce Grant opportunity for local public-private strategies to increase compensation and other strategies to support retention of and recruitment into the ECE workforce.
- Continued support for quality improvement efforts by expanding comprehensive health consultation and outreach to ECE programs; and
- Community Innovation Grants as seed money to pilot or scale up existing best practices or programs, while braiding local child-centered efforts and funding streams.
- Continuing to strengthen with schools, including supporting 4K community approaches.

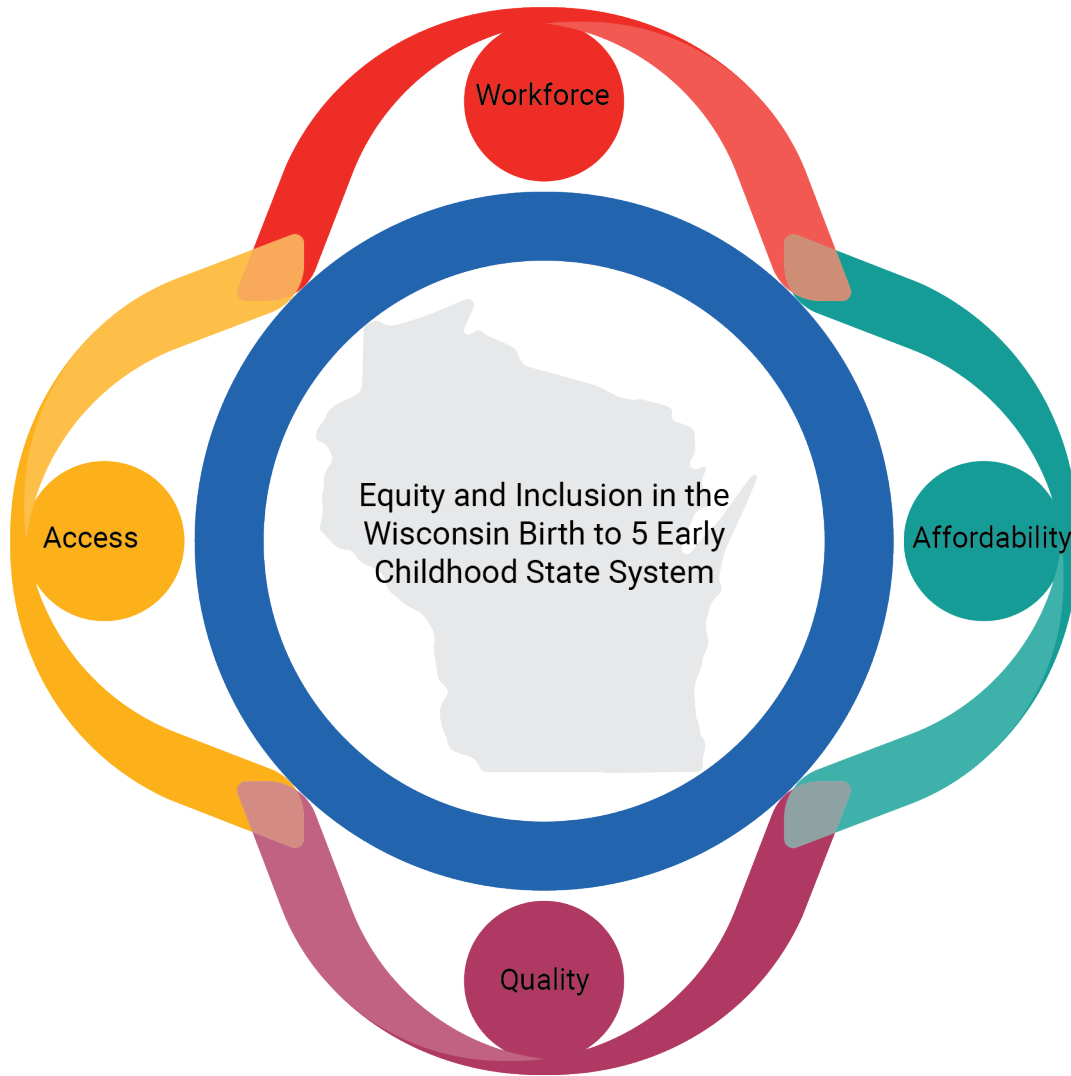
In addition, Wisconsin will use the groundwork laid by PDG and PDG-R to adopt a biennial schedule for periodic updates to its B-5 needs assessment and strategic plan, aligned to the state's biennial budget process. Ultimately, this work is aimed at accelerating Wisconsin's efforts to create an equitable B-5 ECSS that meets families' needs and prepares all Wisconsin children to succeed and thrive. By building more equitable early childhood state and local systems that improve outcomes for the children who need it most, Wisconsin will promote stable and successful families and communities, a thriving workforce, and a more secure economic future for all.



I. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The Preschool Development Grant uses the framework shown below to evaluate and transform ECE in Wisconsin. Wisconsin believes that the availability of ECE to children and families lies at the intersections of a strong workforce supporting accessible, affordable, high-quality early care and education that is centered on equity and inclusion. Therefore, any application of Wisconsin’s definitions for each framework area must always be focused on Wisconsin’s commitment to achieving equity and inclusion in the B-5 ECSS.

FIGURE A: The Wisconsin Preschool Development Grant Framework



The framework and its definitions are intended to encompass all ECE programs—a challenging endeavor given the different purposes, funding streams, and governance structures of the programs involved. Wisconsin will continue to update and refine these definitions as needed to ensure accuracy and address nuances across the B-5 ECSS. In addition, given substantial equity work across DCF and other state Councils (e.g., Equity Advisory Council; Health Equity Council), Wisconsin will ensure its definitions of equity and inclusion align with other definitions in use. Wisconsin has defined key terms from the Preschool Development Grant framework as follows:



TABLE 7: Wisconsin PDG Framework Definitions

<p>Equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of unfair, unjust differences among groups of people in a system, particularly among vulnerable or underserved populations. Equity in ECE means that children, families, and the ECE workforce experience culturally and linguistically responsive interactions that nurture their full range of social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and linguistic abilities; that reflect and model fundamental principles of fairness and justice; and reduce inequity. (Adapted from NAEYC, WHO)
<p>Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the right of all people to involvement in a B-5 ECSS System that empowers all participants—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, or family circumstance—to achieve equitable outcomes across ECE. (Adapted from NAEYC)
<p>Workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people working within the ECE system and its programs.
<p>Access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability for all children and families to identify, engage with, and participate without barriers in quality ECE programs that meet their needs.
<p>Affordability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which price is or is not a barrier to accessing and participating in the ECE programs and services that a family needs. ECE programs are affordable when their price does not jeopardize a participating family’s quality or standard of living. • The extent to which the WI B-5 ECSS and its programs and services have adequate funding sources to equitably serve the children, families, and communities that need them and support the workforce’s quality or standard of living.
<p>Quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability of ECE programs to meet the following attributes of quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Research/evidence-based ◦ Meet industry standards ◦ Meet individual program requirements ◦ Data-driven ◦ Responsive to children, families, community, and workforce needs ◦ Able to provide measurable and observable indicators of their success, including outcomes among children entering kindergarten



Wisconsin Birth to 5 Early Childhood State System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The policy and infrastructure components that support and influence the well-being of children and families across core ECE programs, including<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Child Care◦ Early Head Start and Head Start◦ Part C of IDEA (Birth to 3 Program)◦ Home Visiting◦ Local education agency-sponsored early childhood programs<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Part B, Section 619 of IDEA (Early Childhood Special Education)▪ 4-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K) and 4-Year-Old Kindergarten Community Approach (4KCA)▪ Title I Preschools• In addition, it encompasses a wide range of ECE programs and services that strengthen, engage, and stabilize families and their infants and young children, including supports that target health and wellness. *These include but are not limited to programs such as Medicaid; the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); Title V Maternal and Child Health Programs; Healthy Start; Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and child abuse and neglect and family-support programming.
Vulnerable or Underserved Priority Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wisconsin has defined vulnerable or underserved children, including children residing in rural areas, to include children<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ experiencing poverty◦ of color, including children from the 11 federally recognized sovereign Tribal Nations within Wisconsin’s borders◦ who are multilingual◦ with disabilities or experiencing developmental delays◦ in foster care (including kinship care)◦ receiving in-home safety services and supports◦ experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity◦ whose parents are accessing workforce programs◦ experiencing food insecurity◦ from migrant, immigrant, and refugee families◦ from military families◦ with an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parent and◦ who have experienced abuse or neglect
Rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See below for more information on the complex issue of defining rural in Wisconsin.



Rural definition: Defining rural areas is a complex issue in Wisconsin. Definitions of rural vary throughout Wisconsin state statutes, just as numerous federal definitions exist (e.g., US Census Bureau, USDA). County and school district boundaries—as well as service boundaries for individual programs within state agencies and organizations—are not aligned, creating further challenges in serving rural populations. An example of this challenge is described in Table 8 below:

TABLE 8: Addressing Differing Definitions of ‘Rural’

School Districts (421)	Wisconsin provides sparsity aid to districts whose membership is no more than 745, and whose membership divided by area in square miles is less than 10. 145 districts received sparsity aid in 2018. (Source: DPI) Nationally, the US Department of Education’s National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) uses the US Census Bureau data to classify all US territory into four types—Rural, Town, Suburban, and City—and each type is divided into three subtypes based on population size or proximity to populated areas. For rural classifications, the three subtypes are Fringe, Distant, and Remote. (Source: NCES)
Counties (72)	According to the USDA’s 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Code , 13 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties are considered “completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population,” and 26 are considered “metro areas.”
Census Tracts (1409)	Using a US Census Bureau definition, any area that is not part of an “urbanized area”—any location that is not part of a city or town with more than 2,500 people—is considered rural. According to the UW Applied Population Lab , by this Census definition, 97% of the land in Wisconsin is considered rural, while only 30% of the people in Wisconsin live in rural areas.

For purposes of the 2020 PDG Needs Assessment, Wisconsin considered the following:

- County-level data as defined by the USDA’s 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Code. A snapshot of rural Wisconsin prepared by the University of Wisconsin-Extension in 2015 based on this definition is attached in Appendix A.
- Additional definitions from the USDA and US Census Bureau. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Population Laboratory (APL) created an in-depth analysis of these and other definitions for Wisconsin in a 2017 article entitled “[Putting Rural Wisconsin on the Map: Understanding Rural-Urban Divides Requires a Complex Spectrum of Definitions](#),”. Authors recognize the complexity of these definitions in the article: “Figuring out exactly which places are rural is challenging because rurality is truly a multidimensional concept. Land use, economic activity, population density, commuting patterns, distances to cities, access to services, demographics, and localized culture and politics all contribute to a place being perceived as ‘rural’.”



Finally, in a [report published in December 2020](#), the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity utilized the “State Legislature’s definition of “rural” (county with a population density of less than 155 residents per square mile, per the US Census).” However, the rural stakeholders participating in the Commissions’ work encouraged state leaders to **“recognize that there is no “one rural.”** Per the report:

“All rural is not the same. While some issues and solutions crosscut most of rural Wisconsin, different regions, Tribal Nations and communities need to adopt or adapt different approaches, based on their economies, their place, their people and their conditions at the time. This underlines rural stakeholders’ call for flexibility and authority in determining their priorities, partners, and ability to raise and use funds. It also calls for state programs to design more flexibility or waivers into programs to enable rural efforts to do what needs to be done.” (Source: Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity, 2020)

Looking Ahead to the 2022 Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Wisconsin has made great progress in defining and identifying key terms, including vulnerable or underserved children, to improve upon this work the state will further define each term, identify data, and measure baseline gaps across key performance indicators developed in the Program Performance Evaluation Plan (PPEP). As the state moves forward with updating its Needs Assessment for 2022 and beyond, Wisconsin will engage with stakeholders to determine:

- Do the definitions of all the key terms reflect the broad set of stakeholders within ECE and the broader B-5 ECCS? Do they need to be updated in any way?
- Does the definition of equity utilized within PDG align with other equity frameworks currently being used in the state (e.g., Governor’s Health Equity Council, Governor’s Council on Equity and Inclusion)? Are PDG efforts aligned and connected with these efforts as well?
- Is data currently being captured on all of the populations defined as underserved and vulnerable? If not, how will these gaps be addressed moving forward?
- What are the best ways to address these varying definitions of “rural” in order to get the most accurate picture of how the state is identifying and serving rural children and families?
- How does the impact of structural and systemic racism across the ECE and broader B-5 ECSS influence the experiences and outcomes of children and families who are interacting with these programs?
- How will Wisconsin use these definitions to identify the most appropriate metrics to measure the impact of the state’s B-5 strategic plan and other efforts?



II. FOCAL POPULATIONS: CHILDREN WHO ARE VULNERABLE OR UNDERSERVED

Who are the vulnerable or historically underserved children in Wisconsin?

Wisconsin has defined vulnerable or underserved children above and provides key data on vulnerable or underserved children below.

A majority of the data presented below were retrieved from the [Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center](#) for the year 2019, unless otherwise noted. The substantial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Wisconsin's children and families who are vulnerable or underserved was not analyzed for purposes of this section, as data beyond 2019 was not readily available for most metrics. However, as schools closed, child care centers struggled to stay open, and as many as half of Wisconsin families with children [lost employment income after the onset of the pandemic](#). The impact of the pandemic on Wisconsin's youngest children and their families cannot be overstated. The effects of COVID-19 on this population—as well as the strength of Wisconsin's recovery—will be explored more fully in Wisconsin's 2022 Needs Assessment update.

Characteristics of Wisconsin's Population of Young Children

In 2019, Wisconsin was home to nearly 1,280,000 children under the age of 18, including approximately 400,000 children under the age of 6.

- Over 1 in 7 Wisconsin children (15%) under the age of 6 were experiencing poverty (i.e., below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)), a rate slightly higher than the average of children with ages from 6 to 17 (13%).
 - Among all children under the age of 18, 1 in 3 black children and 1 in 4 Hispanic or Latino children were experiencing poverty.
 - 1 in 3 Wisconsin children under the age of 18 live in low-income families (i.e., below 200% of the FPL), including 7 in 10 black children and 6 in 10 Hispanic or Latino children.
 - Among all children under the age of 18, nearly 1 in 5 black children and 1 in 10 Hispanic or Latino children live in extreme poverty (below 50% of the FPL). Only 3 in 100 white children live in extreme poverty.
- 16% percent of children under the age of 9 are dual language learners.
- 22% percent of children under the age of 6 are at risk for developmental delays.
- 75% percent of Wisconsin children under the age of 6 have [all available parents in the workforce](#).
- 41% of children under the age of 6 have exposure to 1–2 risk factors, and 12% have exposure to three or more risk factors. (Risk factors include poverty, teen mothers, single parents, low parental education, unemployed parents, residential mobility, households without English speakers, and large family size). (Source: [National Center for Children in Poverty](#))
- 21% of all children under the age of 18 have experienced [two or more adverse experiences](#) (e.g., frequent socioeconomic hardship, parental divorce or separation, parental death, parental incarceration, family violence, neighborhood violence, living with someone who was mentally ill or suicidal, living with someone who had a substance abuse problem or racial bias).



More information on each of these characteristics can be found in the following sections.

Race and Ethnicity of Wisconsin's Youngest Children

The race and ethnicity of Wisconsin's children under the age of 5 are summarized in Table 9 below.

TABLE 9: Race/Ethnicity of Wisconsin Children Under the Age of 5 (2019)

Race/Ethnicity	Number	% of population
Non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN)	3,845	1%
Non-Hispanic Asian	11,636	4%
Non-Hispanic Black	30,880	9%
Hispanic or Latino	40,019	12%
Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	217	<0.5%
Non-Hispanic White	229,782	70%
Non-Hispanic 2 or More Race Groups	14,117	4%

(Source: [Kids Count](#))

Tribal Children in Wisconsin

There are eleven federally recognized Tribal Nations headquartered in Wisconsin:

- Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Forest County Potawatomi Community
- Ho-Chunk Nation
- Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- Oneida Nation
- Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Mole Lake (Sokaogon Chippewa Community) Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
- Stockbridge Munsee Community

Table 10 provides some information about the number of children under the age of 5 by tribal area, as defined and estimated by the [US Census Bureau](#).



TABLE 10: Children Under the Age of 5 by Tribal Area in Wisconsin

Tribal Area	Estimated Number of Children under the Age of 5
Bad River Reservation	132
Forest County Potawatomi Community and Off-Reservation Trust Land	92
Ho Chunk Nation Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	127
Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	200
Lac du Flambeau Reservation	154
Menominee Reservation	335
Oneida (WI) Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	1,279
Red Cliff Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	84
Saint Croix Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	68
Sokaogon Chippewa Community	50
Stockbridge Munsee Community and Off-Reservation Trust Land	53

(Source: 2015–2019 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates)

While this census data is the most readily available, there are substantial caveats when using this data.

- The margin of error reported by the US Census Bureau is large—sometimes as high as 40–50% for tribes with smaller populations. As a result, these figures may not be accurate. The federal government has even recognized the limitations of this census data and has a process for tribes to self-certify their own population counts for purposes of federal funding under Title IV-B:

“The ACF allocates funds based on Census Bureau population data but recognizes that this data might not be accurate and has allowed tribes to submit a form, certified by their tribal president/chairperson and the tribal enrollment officer, providing an alternative count.”

(Source: [Title IV-B Funding Overview](#), Capacity Building Center for Tribes, 2018)

- Census figures typically reflect the number of children that are enrolled members of each tribe. The number of children that are eligible for membership or the number of children that are descendants and eligible to receive services from their specific tribe are generally not included and would represent a substantially larger figure.



- Similarly, there are a number of children living in Wisconsin who are from tribes headquartered in Wisconsin, but do not live on reservation or trust land, and thus are not included in these data. It is estimated that nearly 60% of tribal members do not live on reservation or trust land in Wisconsin.
- Finally, there is a large population of tribal members and children from tribes across the country (not headquartered in Wisconsin) that reside in the Milwaukee area that are not reflected in these census data. It is estimated that about half of the total tribal population in the state resides in Milwaukee County.

Wisconsin Children Experiencing Poverty

According to data retrieved from the [Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center](#) for 2019, approximately **14% of Wisconsin children under the age of 18 are experiencing poverty**, defined as living below the federal poverty level. In 2019, a family of two adults and two children were under the federal poverty level (FPL) if their annual income was below \$25,926. **One-third of Wisconsin children live in low-income families**, defined as incomes below 200% of the poverty line, and **6% of Wisconsin children live in extreme poverty**, defined as incomes below 50% of the poverty line.

Racial and ethnic disparities exist when viewed through the lens of poverty.

- **Nearly 1 in 5 black children and almost 1 in 10 Hispanic or Latino children live in extreme poverty, compared to 3 in 100 white children.**
- **More than one-third of black children and one-fourth of Hispanic or Latino children live in families experiencing poverty**, compared to less than 1 in 10 white children who live in families experiencing poverty.
- **7 in 10 black children and 6 in 10 Hispanic or Latino children are members of low-income families**, while fewer than 1 in 4 white children are members of low-income families.

These dramatic racial and ethnic differences underscore Wisconsin's commitment to racial equity as a foundational and urgent state priority.

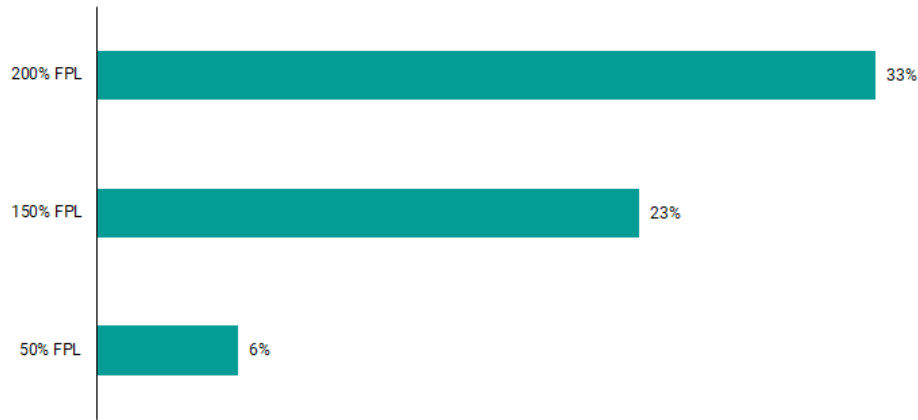
More information on children in poverty is outlined below.

[Children Experiencing Poverty:](#)

While, 11% of [all people in Wisconsin](#) live in households with incomes below the federal poverty level, families with young children are more likely to experience poverty in Wisconsin than other families. Six percent of all children live in extreme poverty (below 50% of FPL). Figure B.



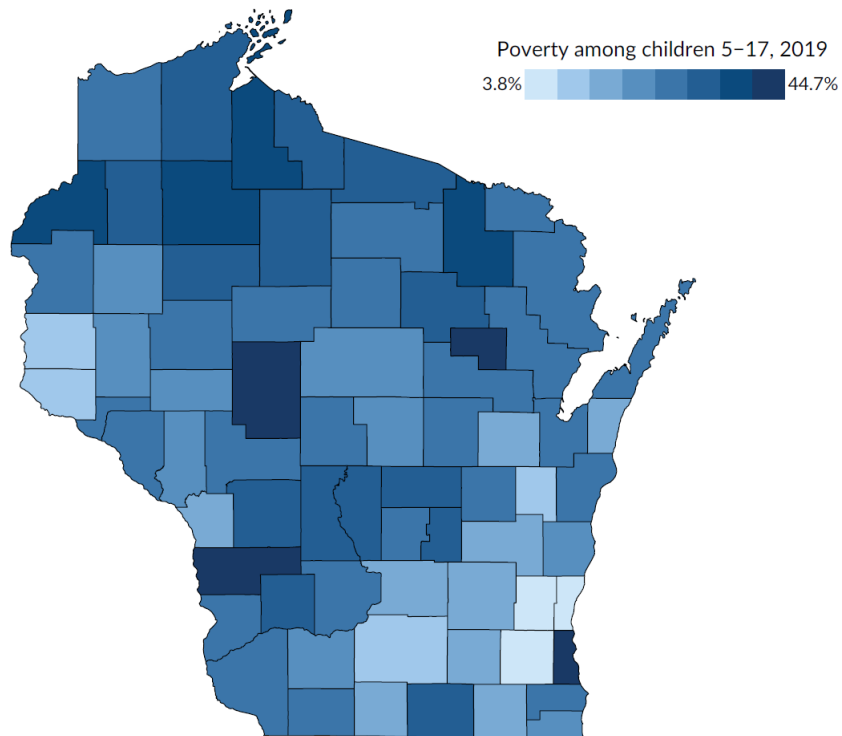
FIGURE B: Percent of Children living in households below a poverty threshold



(Source: Kids Count)

- **15% of children with ages from 0 to 5 live in households below 100% FPL.**
- **12.7% of children age 5 to 17 experience poverty.** Across Wisconsin there is variation among counties. Figure C.

FIGURE C: School-Aged Child Poverty in Wisconsin, 2019 by County



(Source: IRP)

Note: The poverty measures Kids Count uses are from the official Census Bureau measures using only the American Community Survey. The by-county and by-age measures provided by UW-IRP use SAIPE measure. Both of these measures use the same threshold and formula for measuring poverty, but SAIPE uses more data sources in order to produce measures for smaller units of geography and subpopulations.



Children Experiencing Poverty by Race/Ethnicity:

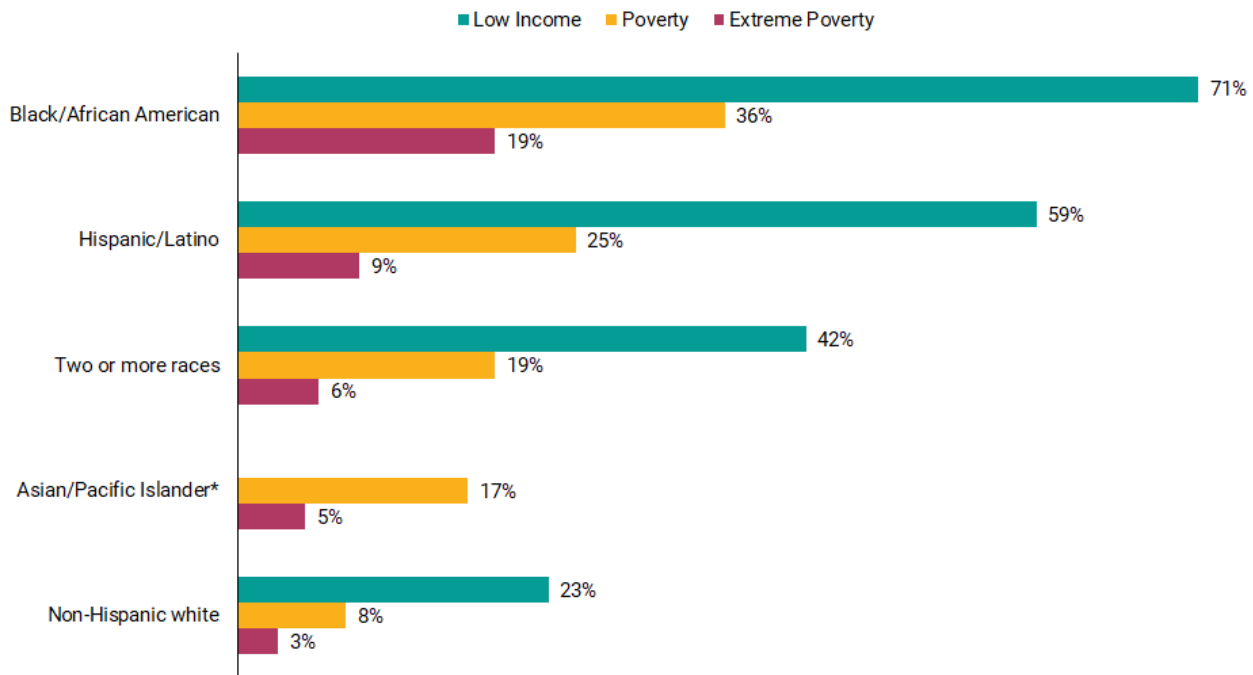
TABLE 11: Percent of Children under the age of 18 in Wisconsin Living in Poverty by FPL

Federal Poverty Level (FPL)	Percent of Children under the age of 18	Poverty Threshold for a Family of Two Adults and Two Children in 2019
200%	33%	\$51,853
100%	14%	\$25,926
50%	6%	\$12,968

(Source: Kids Count)

Racial disparities are seen along all poverty indicators. Black children are experiencing poverty at significantly higher rates than white children. Nineteen percent of black children in Wisconsin are living in extreme poverty, while 3% of white children are living in extreme poverty. Figure D.

FIGURE D: Children under age 18 Living in Poverty



*Data unavailable or suppressed for percent of children living in low-income families.

(Source: Kids Count)



Children within Wisconsin's Immigrant Population

As [defined by the Wisconsin DPI](#), "Immigrants are individuals who immigrate; or take up residence in a new country. Refugees are people who flee their home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, but could also be considered immigrant." (Source: [DPI Immigrant and Refugee webpage](#)) Information about Wisconsin's immigrant and refugee populations are provided below.

In 2019, 2% of all Wisconsin children under the age of 18 (23,000) were [foreign-born](#) (either naturalized citizens or not citizens of the United States).

Approximately 12% of all Wisconsin children under the age of 18 (150,000) live in immigrant families, where they are either [foreign-born or live with at least one parent who is foreign-born](#). Of these children:

- 91% of children (137,000) in immigrant families are [citizens](#).
- 35% of children (52,000) live in immigrant families in which [neither resident parent is a citizen](#).
- 3% of children (4,000) are members of immigrant families where neither resident parent has [lived in the country for more than five years](#).

The following describes Wisconsin children in immigrant families by [parent's region of origin](#):

- Latin America - 48% (71,000)
- Asia - 31% (46,000)
- Europe - 11% (17,000)
- Africa - 4% (6,000)

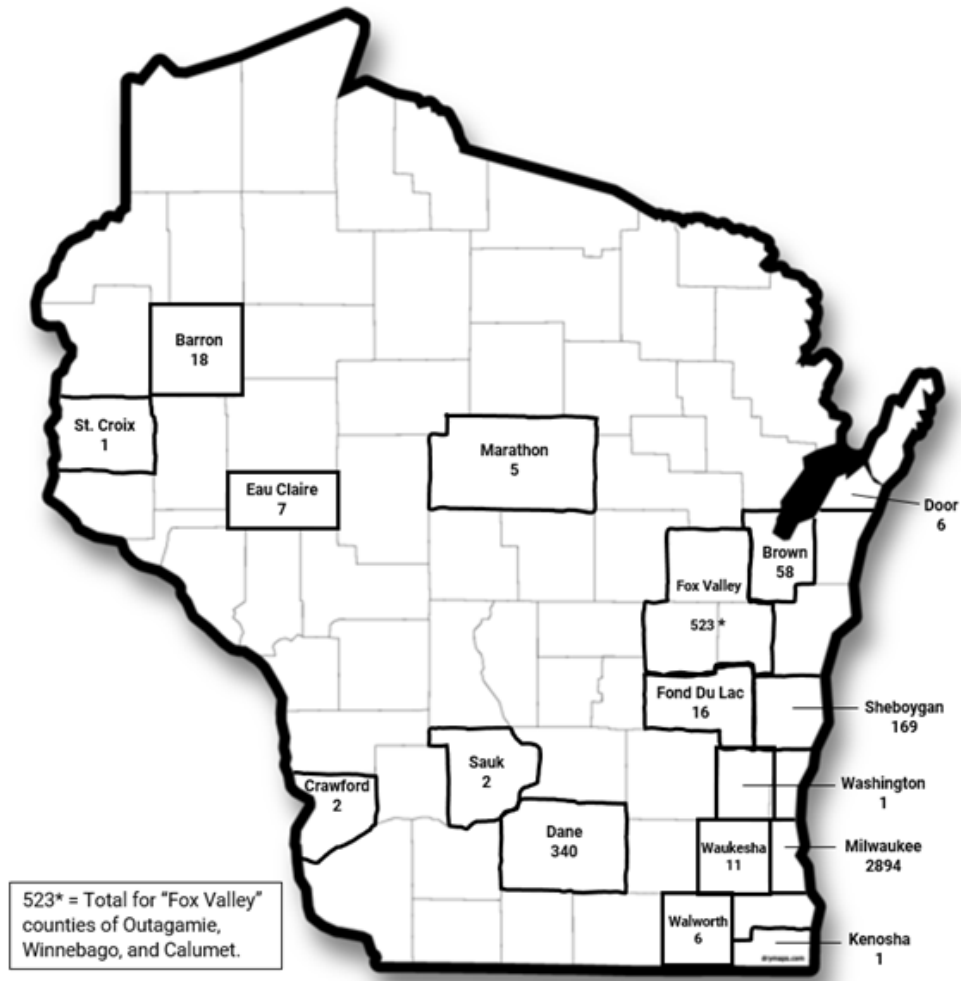
Wisconsin's Refugee Population

DCF's Bureau of Refugee Programs (BRP) receives grants from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and "funds local statewide organizations to provide critical services to refugees. BRP ensures provision and coordination of services that help refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency and social adjustment upon their arrival to the US" (Source: [DCF](#))

According to data collected by DCF, Wisconsin received 4,060 refugees of all ages in fiscal year 2016 through 2020. Figure E. The majority of the refugee arrivals were from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burma. Demographic information by age was not readily available but will be analyzed for the state's 2022 Needs Assessment.



FIGURE E: Wisconsin Refugees by County (Fiscal Years 2016–2020)



(Source: [DCF](#))

Wisconsin's Multilingual Learners

In 2019, 103,000 Wisconsin children under the age of 18 (11%) [spoke a language other than English](#) at home.

Wisconsin's youngest multilingual learners are sometimes called "dual language learners." [According to DPI](#), "Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are generally referred to as children birth through age 5 who acquire two or more languages simultaneously, and learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language." (Source: [DPI Early Childhood/Dual Language Learners webpage](#))

Based on a [profile of Wisconsin Dual Language Learners](#) (prepared in October 2017 by the Migration Policy Institute utilizing information from US Census Bureau's American Community Survey and other sources), DLLs comprise 16% of the population of children under the age of 9, a population whose growth has outpaced the national average since 2000.



- 63% of children (65,000) who are dual language learners live in low-income families.
 - 33% of those (34,000) are experiencing poverty.
- 38% of parents who are dual language learners have limited English proficiency.
- 27% of parents who are dual language learners have less than a high school education, compared to 4% of non-DLL parents.

Additional demographic information of children who are dual language learners is shown by age (Table 12) and race/ethnicity (Table 13):

TABLE 12: Wisconsin DLL Population under the Age of 9 by Age Group, 2011–2015

Age Group	Number	% of total DLL
0–2	33,000	31%
3–4	24,000	24%
5–8	45,000	44.1%
Total	102,000	100%

(Source: Migration Policy Institute 2017)

TABLE 13: Wisconsin DLL Population under the Age of 9 by Race/Ethnicity, 2011–2015

Race/Ethnicity	Number	% of total DLL
Hispanic	50,000	48.7%
White/other	25,000	24.8%
Asian	21,000	20.9%
Black	5,000	4.6%
American Indian	1,000	1.1%
Total	102,000	100%

(Source: Migration Policy Institute 2017)

As of 2015, the top five home languages spoken by parents of dual language learners were:

- Spanish, which was spoken by 50.0% of DLL parents (56,000)
- Hmong, which was spoken by 8.8% of DLL parents (10,000)



- German, which was spoken by 5.3% of DLL parents (6,000)
- Chinese,* which was spoken by 2.1% of DLL parents (2,000)
- Arabic, which was spoken by 1.9% of DLL parents (2,000)

*Chinese included Cantonese, Mandarin, and other Chinese languages

Children with Disabilities and/or Experiencing Developmental Delays

In 2011–2012, 22% of Wisconsin parents with children under the age of 6 [reported that their children were at risk for developmental delays](#).

- A significantly higher percentage of low-income parents (29%) reported concerns for developmental delays than parents who were not low-income (17%).

Early Intervention Services for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

- According to Wisconsin’s Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 24,827 children were evaluated for Wisconsin’s Birth to 3 Program in 2019. A child qualifies for the program if he or she is younger than three years-old and has a significant developmental delay of 25% or more or a physician-diagnosed and documented condition likely to result in a developmental delay.
- Of these children, **12,725 were eligible, enrolled, and received early intervention services**. (Source: [LFB Informational Paper #49, January 2021](#))

Early Childhood Special Education for Children from Ages 3 to 5

- According to data provided to EdFacts and as reported by DPI, in the 2018–19 school year, there were 16,403 children with ages from 3 to 5 in Wisconsin that had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Of these children:
 - 5,798 attended a regular early childhood program and received the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program;
 - 2,631 attended a separate special education class;
 - 34 attended a separate school.

(Source: Wisconsin DPI, [Annual Performance Plan 2018–19](#), Indicator #6)

Parental Employment, Income, and Job Insecurity

75% of Wisconsin children under the age of 6 have [all available parents in the workforce](#), a rate that exceeds the national average of 68%. As a result, quality early care and education opportunities for Wisconsin’s youngest children is a necessity for the vast majority of Wisconsin families.

The [median family income](#) among Wisconsin families with children was \$78,000 in 2019. The median family income for white families was more than double that of Black or American Indian families. Figure F.



FIGURE F: Wisconsin Family Median Family Income



(Source: Kids Count)

Approximately 24% of Wisconsin children under the age of 6 are members of low-income working families.

Low-income working families are defined as families where total income was less than twice the federal poverty level and at least one parent worked 50 or more weeks during the previous year.

[Children Whose Parents Lack Secure Employment by Race/Ethnicity \(2019\)](#)

- 4% of Wisconsin children under the age of 18 had [at least one unemployed parent](#).
- 22% of Wisconsin children under the age of 18 have [parents who lack job security](#), including:
 - 16% of children who are Asian/Pacific Islander
 - **48% of children who are Black/African American**
 - 27% of children who are Hispanic/Latino
 - 16% of children who are non-Hispanic white
 - 29% of children who are two or more races

Wisconsin Families and Children Accessing Economic and Other Supports

Approximately **20% of all Wisconsin children (under the age of 18) are in [families receiving public assistance](#)** (Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or Food Stamps/SNAP), including:

- **58% of children who are Black/African American**
- 31% of children who are Hispanic/Latino



- 12% of children who are non-Hispanic white
- 33% of children who are two or more races

Wisconsin families' participation in a set of workforce/economic support programs is outlined below:

FoodShare/SNAP

- Over 609,000 individuals in Wisconsin [received benefits](#) under the federal FoodShare/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2019. SNAP provides nutritional support for low-wage working families, low-income seniors, and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes.
- 37.2% of households receiving SNAP benefits have children. (Source: [Feeding America](#))

Caretaker Supplement

- In 2019, 9,416 Wisconsin children had a parent who [received a caretaker supplement](#). According to DHS, "Wisconsin's Caretaker Supplement (CTS) is a cash benefit available to parents who are eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments. Caretaker Supplement is not a Medicaid benefit; it pays cash only to eligible parents."

Earned Income Tax Credit

- The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is offered to low-income families with children as a refundable credit at both the federal and state levels. In 2019, nearly 230,000 Wisconsin taxpayers claimed the Wisconsin EITC. (Source: [Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau Informational Paper #12](#), 2021)

Wisconsin Works (W-2)

- In 2019, there were an average of [5,478 participants](#) with paid placements in the state's welfare-to-work program (W-2). This number has substantially declined from the early 2010s, where annual averages ranged above 15,000. This decline puts low-income families and their children at greater risk of hardship.

BadgerCare Plus

- In April 2021, over 421,000 children under 18 were enrolled in BadgerCare Plus, a health care coverage program for low income people in Wisconsin. (Source: [DHS](#))
- BadgerCare Plus is funded by a combination of Medicaid and the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Health care coverage for children at lower income levels and most pregnant women is funded by Medicaid, while coverage for children at higher income levels and some pregnant women is funded by CHIP.

Other DHS Medicaid Programs:

- DHS provides funding and support for [a number of other Medicaid programs](#) for low-income children, children with disabilities and complex medical needs, and other vulnerable or underserved children.



They include:

- Medicaid for the Elderly, Blind, and Disabled
- BadgerCare Plus Emergency Services
- Care4Kids Program
- Children Come First
- Children’s Long-Term Support Waiver Program
- Katie Beckett Program
- Wraparound Milwaukee

DHS Public Health Programs

- The [DHS Division of Public Health](#) houses several programs focused on health promotion and prevention that positively impact children and families. These include:
 - Maternal and Child Health
 - Immunizations
 - Environmental Health (including the Lead-Safe Wisconsin program)
 - Clean Water
 - Oral Health
 - WIC Program
 - Tobacco Prevention

DHS Maternal and Child Health Programs

- DHS provides or coordinates a number of [maternal and child health programs](#) for young children and mothers, including:
 - Maternal and Child Health Program (Title V)
 - The Birth to Three Program (referenced above)
 - Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs
 - Breastfeeding
 - Equity in Birth Outcomes Initiative
 - Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Initiative
 - Newborn Screening
 - Immunizations
 - Prenatal Care Coordination
 - Wisconsin Well Woman Program
 - Childhood Communicable Diseases



Wisconsin Children Experiencing Hunger and/or Food Insecurity

Hunger and food insecurity are realities faced by children across Wisconsin in urban and rural settings alike. According to [the USDA](#), food security for a household “means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”

- **One in seven Wisconsin children struggles with hunger.** (Source: [Feeding America](#))
- Household **food insecurity affected 13.6% of Wisconsin households with children** in 2019. In some of these food-insecure households only adults were food insecure. In other food-insecure households, children also experienced food insecurity.
- An estimated 21% of all Wisconsin children (under the age of 18) were in [families that were food insecure](#) at some point during 2017–2019.
- **Nationally, 86% of counties with high child food insecurity are rural.** (Source: Feeding America)

[Feeding America’s 2020 Report on Child Food Insecurity](#) clearly delineates how food insecurity impacts child health and wellbeing:

“There is a broad base of literature illustrating links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes at every age. For example, food-insecure women are more likely to experience birth complications than food-secure women and have iron deficiencies. One indicator of child and maternal health is low birthweight among infants, which is more common among counties with the highest rates of child food insecurity than across all counties (10% versus 8%). Furthermore, children struggling with food insecurity may be at greater risk for stunted development, anemia and asthma, oral health problems, hospitalization, mental disorders, and lower nutrient intakes. Overall, food insecurity is linked with poorer physical quality of life, which may prevent children from fully engaging in daily activities. At school, food-insecure children are at increased risk of falling behind their food-secure peers both academically and socially; food insecurity is linked to lower grades and non-cognitive skills, and they may be more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, including anxiety, psychological distress and substance use and to experience bullying.”

Wisconsin families’ participation in food support programs is outlined below:

WIC Participation

Nearly 103,000 Wisconsin children under the age of 5 received benefits under the [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children](#) (WIC) in 2019. WIC provides nutritional assistance and support for low-income pregnant women, infants, women who are breastfeeding, postpartum women, and children younger than 5. In 2018, nearly 150,000 participants received benefits and services at any point during the year. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) provides extensive information and data about WIC participation on its [website](#), including participation rates by county.

In addition to food support services provided directly to families, DPI administers community and school nutrition programs that serve children. These programs include:



- National School Lunch Program
- National School Breakfast Program
- After School Snack Program
- Wisconsin Special Milk Program
- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Summer Food Service Program
- Donated Food Distribution Program
- Weekend Food Program

More information about these programs, including [participation rates and expenditures](#), can be found on the DPI's School Nutrition website.

Of particular note to the birth to five population is the child care component of the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). It provides reimbursement for nutritious meals and snacks served to infants and children enrolled in nonresidential group child care centers, outside of school hours care centers, and Head Start programs.

Healthy Early is "a statewide collaborative comprised of over 90 multi-sector partners from state agencies, the private and non-profit sectors, academia, and several state and regional-level ECE and child advocacy organizations." It developed an analysis of CACFP participation by child care centers in Wisconsin in the context of food deserts and families living below 185% of FPL. In addition to detailed statewide maps, the resource provides recommendations and strategies to understand barriers, boost awareness, and work with partners to increase CACFP participation. (Source: [CACFP Participation in Wisconsin](#))

Wisconsin Children Experiencing Homelessness

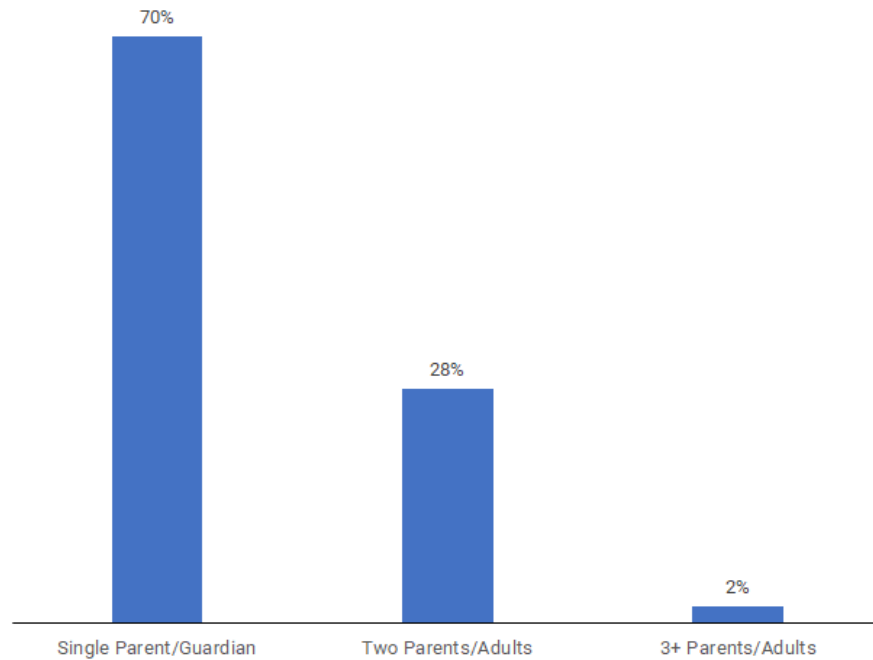
According to the [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#),

"Homelessness jeopardizes the health, early development, and educational well-being of infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. It also creates unique barriers to enrolling and participating in early childhood care and education. This is especially troubling in light of the fact that over 50% of children living in federally-funded homeless shelters are under the age of five, and therefore at an age where early childhood education can have a significant positive impact on their development and future academic achievement."

In 2019, an estimated 21,632 Wisconsin residents that were experiencing homelessness received services and shelter. Twenty-seven percent of persons experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin who sought services did so as members of a family (with adults and children). Seventy percent are households with one adult and at least one child. Figure G. On average, families with children have two children. Fourteen percent of families have 4 or more children. Affordable housing is difficult to find for all low-income families, and its is even harder for large families. (Source: [Institute for Community Alliances](#))



FIGURE G: Families with Adults and Children



(Source: Institute for Community Alliances)

According to the [US Department of Education](#):

- 4% of Wisconsin children under the age of 6 (18,006) were experiencing homelessness in 2015–16.
- Only 16% of Wisconsin’s children experiencing homelessness under the age of 6 (2,881) were served by a federally-funded early childhood education program (Head Start/Early Head Start, McKinney Vento) in 2015–16.

(Source: [Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles](#), USD OE, 2018)

According to data collected from US Department of Education’s EdFacts Initiative by the National Center for Homeless Education, Table 13 describes subgroups of homeless children/youth enrolled in public schools in Wisconsin (grades PK–12) from 2017–2019. While not exclusive to the PDG target populations, these data give an indication of the housing challenges facing Wisconsin children across subgroups at any point during the year.



TABLE 14: Subgroups of Children/Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Wisconsin

Number of children/youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in public schools who are:			
Subgroup Type	SY 2016–2017	SY 2017–2018	SY 2018–2019
Migratory children/youth	55	37	44
Unaccompanied homeless youth	2,283	2,405	2,322
Children with disabilities (IDEA)	4,359	4,249	4,566
Limited English Proficient (LEP) students	1,334	1,272	1,278
Total	8,031	7,963	8,210

(Source: [National Center for Homeless Education](#))

Wisconsin Children at Risk for Homelessness

As noted above, 1 in 4 Wisconsin children under the age of 6 live in low-income working families, which can put those children and their families at higher risk for either chronic or episodic homelessness.

Further, 22% of all Wisconsin children under the age of 18 live in households with high housing cost burdens (i.e., where more than 30% of the monthly income was spent on rent, mortgage payments, taxes, insurance, and/or related expenses). Racial and ethnic differences exist on this metric.

- 50% Black/African American children under the age of 18 live in [households with high housing cost burdens](#),
- 33% of Hispanic/Latino,
- 16% of non-Hispanic white, and
- 31% of two or more races

Approximately 54% of children who live in low-income households (i.e., households with incomes less than 200% of the FPL) also have a [high housing cost burden](#).

Wisconsin Children in Foster Care or Kinship Care

According to [DCF Wisconsin Out-of-Home \(OHC\) Annual Report for Calendar Year 2019](#), OHC placement settings include:

- Foster homes, including receiving homes, foster family homes of all levels and pre-adoptive foster homes
- Unlicensed relative and non-relative homes



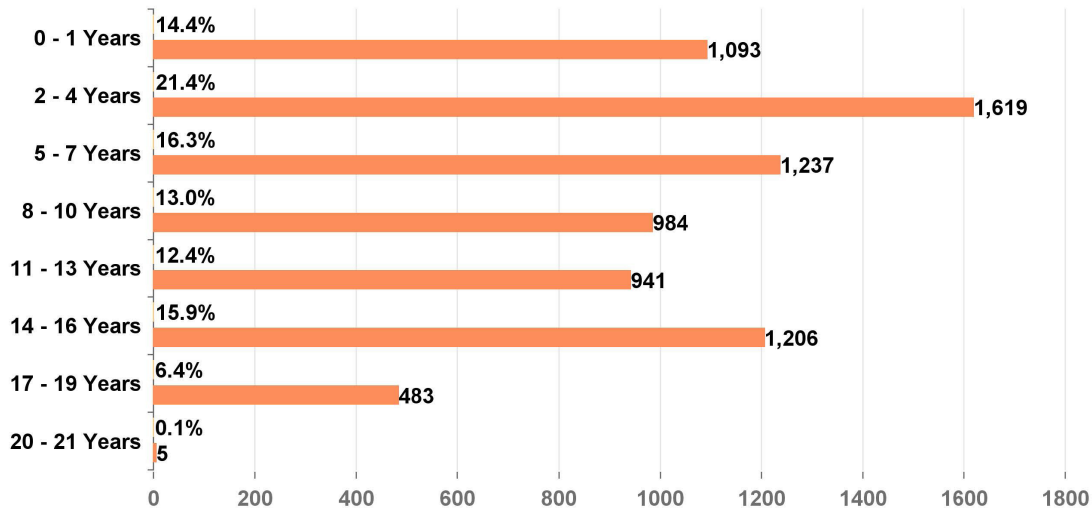
- Group homes
- Residential care centers (RCCs)
- Shelter care
- Detention
- Trial reunification
- Supervised independent living
- Hospital/Mental Health facility

On December 31, 2019, 7,568 Wisconsin children were in Out-of-Home Care. 26% of which are children under the custody of the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services. 38.2% of children were placed with relatives.

- 56% were White/Caucasian,
- 32.4% were Black/African American,
- 10.7% were Latino/Hispanic,
- 8% were Native American. 69.9% of Native American children were subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

On December 31, 2019, children in age group 2 years through 4 years were in OHC at the highest percent. Figure H.

FIGURE H: Children in Out-of-Home Care by Age Range, December 31, 2019



(Source: [OHC Annual Report, 2019](#), DCF)



In 2019, 2% of Wisconsin children lived in kinship care. According to DCF, Kinship Care is a program “to help support a child who lives outside of his or her home with the relative. The child may be living temporarily or for the long term with a relative such as:

- An adult brother or sister
- A first cousin
- A nephew or niece
- An uncle or aunt or a grandparent
- Others by blood or marriage (see [Ch. DCF 58.03](#) Administrative code for the definition of Relative).”

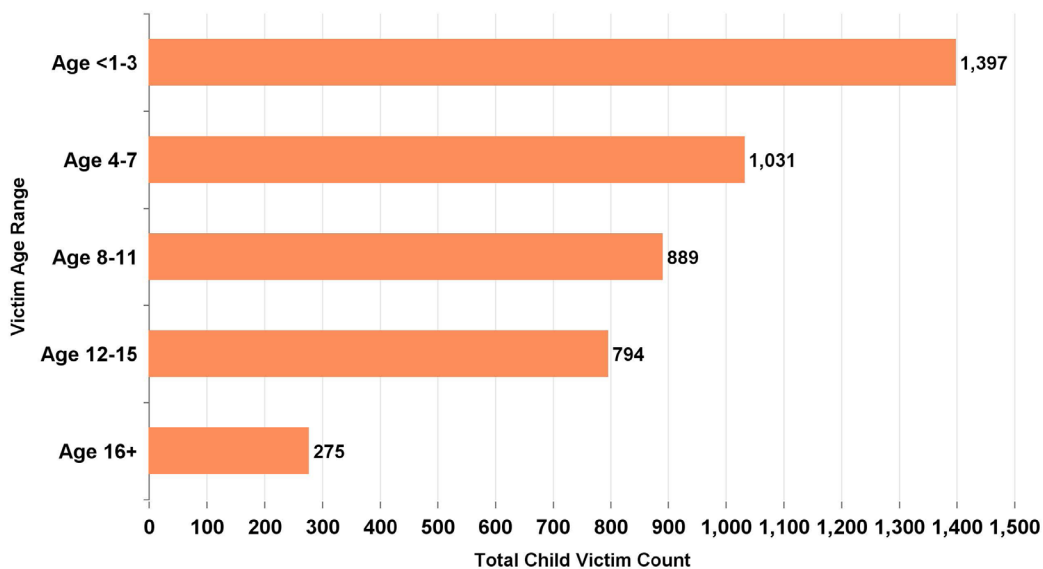
(Source: DCF)

Wisconsin Children who have Experienced Child Abuse and Neglect

Child Protective Services (CPS) is supervised by DCF in 71 counties, and state-run by DCF’s Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS) in Milwaukee County. DCF provides extensive data about children who have experienced abuse and neglect through an annual report. Using data from the Child Welfare Data Warehouse (dWISACWIS), findings from the [2019 Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Annual Report](#) include:

- **4,379 unique child victims of maltreatment.** A child is a victim if he/she had at least one substantiated maltreatment finding at the conclusion of a CPS Initial Assessment.
 - **Children under the age of 3 accounted for the largest number of victims, and 55.4% of victims were under the age of 8.** These proportions have been stable over time. Figure I.

FIGURE I: Age Range of Unique Child Maltreatment Victims



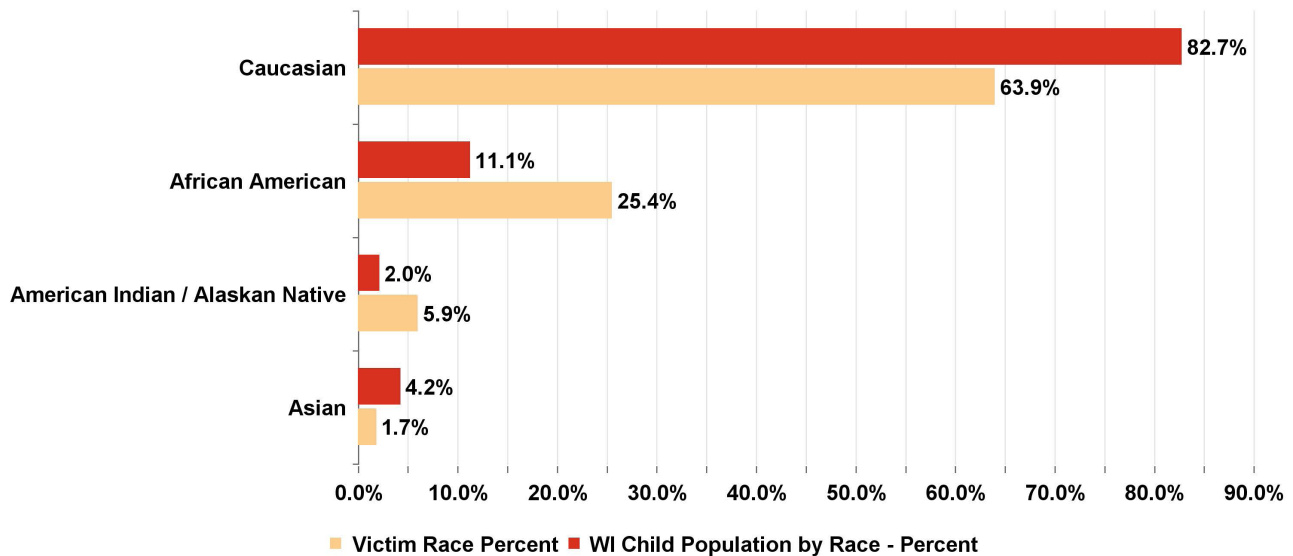
* The total number of children included in this chart is slightly larger than the number of unique victims in Table 9 as some children were maltreated multiple times throughout the year, and belong in two age groups.

(Source: [2019 Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Annual Report](#))



- Likely due to the extreme inequities outlined elsewhere in this report, “African American children and American Indian/Alaskan Native children are victims of child maltreatment at higher proportions than their comparative share of the general Wisconsin child population.” Figure J.

FIGURE J: Victim and Wisconsin Child Population by Race Comparison



* Population source: Office of Juvenile Justice 2019 Easy Access Population Profile: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/>

^ The 125 victims (2.9%) who are identified as ‘unable to determine’ or ‘not documented’ are not included in the chart above. Likewise the 8 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander victims are also not depicted above.

(Source: [2019 Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Annual Report](#))

- There were 150 maltreatment allegations for children under the age of 5 where the maltreatment description was one of the abusive head trauma and impacted baby related diagnoses. Of these 150 allegations, 58 (38.7%) were found to be substantiated upon completion of the CPS Initial Assessment (representing 54 child victims). A total of 46 of the 58 substantiated allegations were for children under the age of one.
- 27 children died in cases where maltreatment was substantiated. Of these 27 cases:
 - 13 children were under the age of 1;
 - 12 children were between the ages of 1 to 5;
 - 2 children were over the age of 5.
- 3,213 children were removed from their family home and placed in an out-of-home placement during the CPS Initial Assessment in order to ensure child safety. The average age for these children was 6 years old.

According to a [research brief](#) by the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Institute on Research on Poverty, “Infants and children under 3 years of age are at greatest risk of being neglected and abused, and the effects



of maltreatment and associated toxic stress are especially harmful to their development. Experiencing maltreatment in early childhood may adversely influence the formation of secure attachments to caregivers, which is considered crucial for social and emotional development. Studies have found that insecure attachment is associated with later psychosocial problems such as anxiety, depression, acting out, and substance use.” (Source: [Selected State Strategies to Help Foster Children Succeed](#), UW-IRP, 2016)

Wisconsin Children who have Experienced Parental Incarceration

In 2017–18, over 100,000 Wisconsin children under the age of 18 (8%) had [experienced having a parent in jail or prison](#).

According to [UW-Madison’s Institute for Research and Poverty](#), children experience a variety of substantial impacts when a parent is incarcerated, including loss of daily parental contact, financial support for the family, emotional distress, change in family structure, negative family dynamics, and more.

“Compared to other children, children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to experience higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and physical health problems... Emotional and economic stress at home puts children at a higher risk for social and cognitive difficulties. Studies show that children with incarcerated parents are twice as likely as their peers without a parent in prison to develop behavioral or mental health problems, including increased aggression, depression, and anxiety. They are also more likely to associate with delinquent peers, get into fights, skip school, have trouble concentrating, and to perform poorly in school. To make matters worse, children of incarcerated parents often face stigma at school from both teachers and peers, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation that contribute to their stress.

Research suggests that increased exposure to the social, emotional, and economic risk factors of having a parent in prison may affect children beyond childhood. Struggles in school and stresses associated with having an incarcerated parent may affect a child’s socioeconomic attainment later in life, limiting their opportunities. Because people with low levels of education and low-income have a higher chance of being incarcerated, the effects of parental incarceration may extend beyond one generation, potentially passing disadvantage from one generation to another.” (Source: [Life Behind Bars: Children with an Incarcerated Parent](#), UW-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty)

As the number of incarcerated individuals has grown exponentially since the 1980s, so too has the impact on young children and families. According to a [report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), the number of children with incarcerated fathers grew 500% from 1980–2000. The same report found:

“Overwhelmingly, incarcerated parents are fathers, many of them young. In state and federal prisons, about 45% of men age 24 or younger are fathers. For the same age group, about 48% of women in federal prison and 55% in state facilities are mothers. Although the percentages are higher for women, the actual numbers of mothers behind bars are a fraction of those for fathers, mirroring the total prison population. The number of children with a father in prison rose by more than half between 1991 and 2007, and those with a mother behind bars more than doubled.” (Source: [“Children of Incarcerated Parents, A Shared Sentence”](#), Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016)



In Wisconsin—the state with [the highest rate of incarceration of black men in the country](#)—parental incarceration has deep impacts on Black communities in the state. According to one 2014 analysis, half of African American men in their 30s in Wisconsin have been in state prison, as have a third of men in their late 20s. (Source: [“Wisconsin’s Mass Incarceration of Black Males,”](#) Pawasarat and Quinn, UW-Milwaukee Employment and Training Institute, 2014)

[One study](#) that examined Wisconsin longitudinal data from 2004–2012 also found a strong intersection between CPS-involved children and parental incarceration. Specifically:

- “More than 8% of CPS-involved children and nearly 11% of children in OHP [Out of Home Placement] have a parent who is incarcerated in state prison in the month of or 11 months following a screened-in CPS report or the start of an OHP.
 - In Milwaukee County, fully 28% of all CPS-involved children and 34% of children in OHP have a parent in jail or prison.”
- “More than 15% of incarcerated adults have children who become CPS-involved in the month of or 11 months following their incarceration; almost 6% have children in OHP.
 - In Milwaukee County, these figures are 18% and 6% when incarceration in both state prison and county jail are considered.
 - In addition, female prisoners are substantially more likely than male prisoners to have a CPS-involved child following their incarceration and black prisoners are disproportionately likely to have CPS-involved children.”

(Source: [Families at the Intersection of the Criminal Justice and Child Protective Services Systems](#), Berger et al., 2016)

Wisconsin Children in Military-Connected Families

Children who are in military-connected families face unique social, emotional, and academic challenges. For example, a military-connected child can expect to move 6–9 times throughout their K–12 career, including twice in high school. (Source: DPI)

- Nationally, as of May 2018, there were approximately 1.6 million dependent children of the US military, 66% of whom were school-age (5–18). (Source: [Military Interstate Compact Commission 2020 Annual Report](#))
- Wisconsin has children of active duty, the National Guard, and Reserves military members in every community and every school district. (Source: DPI)
- Wisconsin has two large military bases—Fort McCoy (Monroe County) and Volk Field (Juneau County)—and a large Coast Guard presence for Lake Michigan and Lake Superior.
- To address data challenges in identifying this population in Wisconsin, the DPI began collecting data in the 2018–19 school year to identify children of military families in order to “allow schools, the DPI,



and the Wisconsin Commissioner for the Interstate Compact to provide stronger support to military connected children.” The data is self-reported by parents, and defined as follows: “Parent in Military is a student characteristic indicating the student has a parent or guardian who is a member of the armed forces on active duty, serves full-time National Guard duty, or is a traditional member of the National Guard or Reserve.” (Source: [DPI](#))

Who are Wisconsin’s Rural Children?

As previously noted, defining “rural” is a complex issue in Wisconsin, as it is around the country. Analyzing Wisconsin’s rural child population will be a primary focus of Wisconsin’s 2022 Needs Assessment update.

One resource newly available to Wisconsin’s ECE stakeholders is the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity, and a related Office of Rural Prosperity within Wisconsin’s Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). During 2020, many Wisconsin rural stakeholders engaged with the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity, which Governor Evers launched as part of his 2020 State of the State Address. The Commission’s December 2020 report, [Rural Voices for Prosperity](#), provides a rich blueprint from which early care and education stakeholders can build the 2022 Needs Assessment and 2023–25 B-5 ECSS Strategic Plan. Indeed, many of the areas identified in the state’s 2020 Needs Assessment process around child care and education—(including child care access and affordability) are strongly reinforced and echoed in this report.

As a result, while Wisconsin has rural definitions for its rural child populations and its ECE programs, more work can and will be done to refine these definitions, analyze data and trends, and establish shared indicators in 2022 and beyond. The following provides a window into Wisconsin’s rural populations which will be built upon going forward.

Identifying Rural Populations

Depending on the definition used, approximately 25–30% of Wisconsin’s population lives in a rural area.

- Based on the [2010 US Census](#), approximately 30% of Wisconsin’s population was rural.
- According to the [USDA’s Economic Research Service \(ERS\)](#), described in Table 15 below, 25% of Wisconsin’s population was rural in 2019.

TABLE 15: Wisconsin Population in 2019

Rural Population	Urban Population	Total Population
1,502,031	4,320,403	5,822,434



USDA 2013-Rural Urban Continuum Code

For purposes of the PDG 2020 Needs Assessment analysis, one definition that Wisconsin has chosen to use is the [USDA's 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes](#), which “form a classification scheme that distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area. The official Office of Management and Budget (OMB) metro and nonmetro categories have been subdivided into three metro and six nonmetro categories. Each county in the US..., is assigned one of the 9 codes.” (Source: [USDA ERS](#))

Using this definition and detailed in Appendix A, **Wisconsin has thirteen counties that are defined as completely rural:** Florence, Forest, Iron, Price, and Vilas (not adjacent to a metro area) and Adams, Bayfield, Buffalo, Lafayette, Marquette, Menominee, and Pepin (adjacent to a metro area). Appendix B provides a labeled map of Wisconsin's counties.

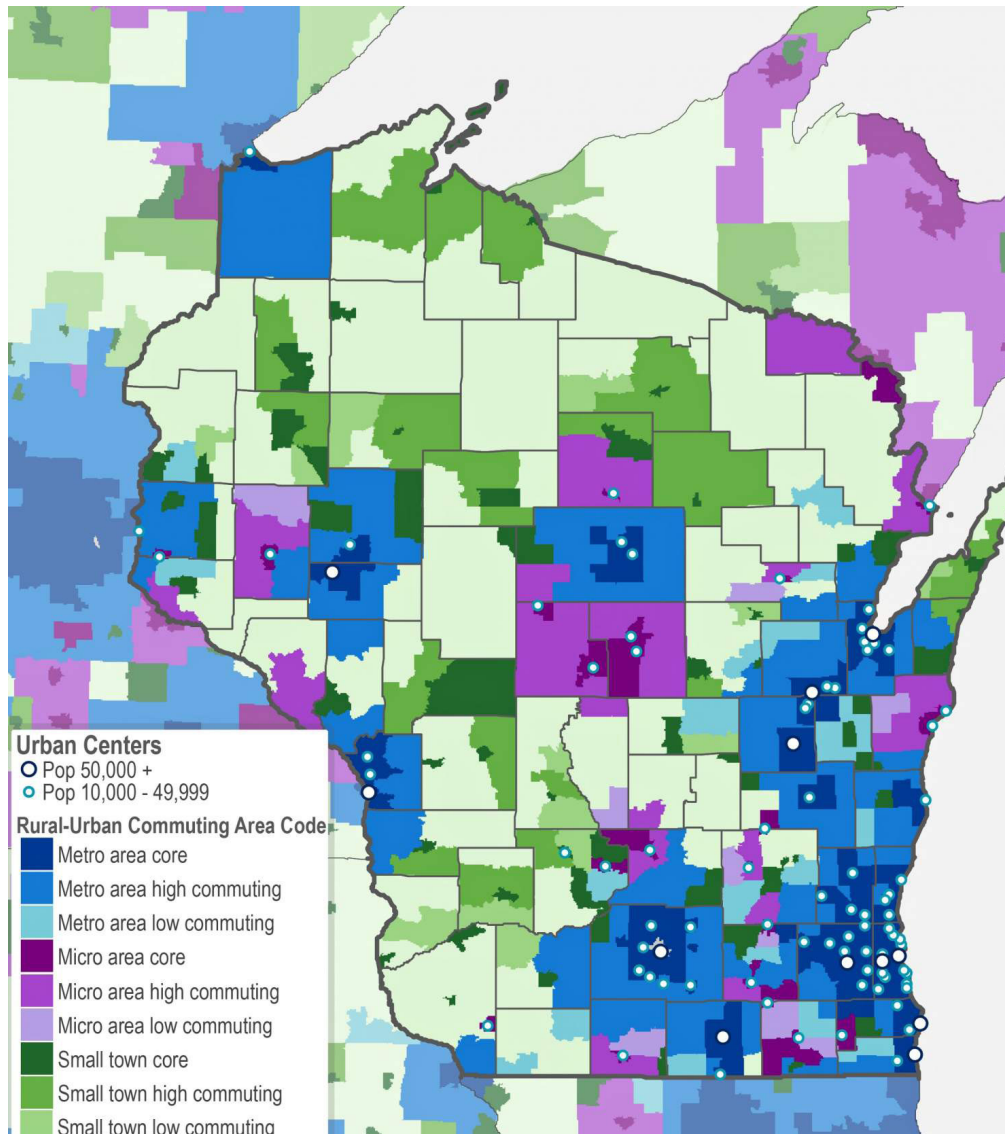
USDA Rural-Urban Community Area Code

The USDA has also developed [Rural-Urban Commuting Area \(RUCA\)](#) codes to “classify US census tracts using measures of population density, urbanization, and daily commuting.” A map of Wisconsin's counties by RUCA code, as developed by the [UW-Madison Applied Population Lab](#), is provided in Figure K below.

According to this 2017 analysis from the UW-Madison Applied Population Laboratory, **“In Wisconsin, rural areas with very few city or town-bound commuters comprise 38% of all the land area and just 8% of the population.”**



FIGURE K: Wisconsin Rural-Urban Commuting Codes, 2010



(Source: [Putting Rural Wisconsin On The Map](#), UW-Madison Applied Population Lab, 2017)

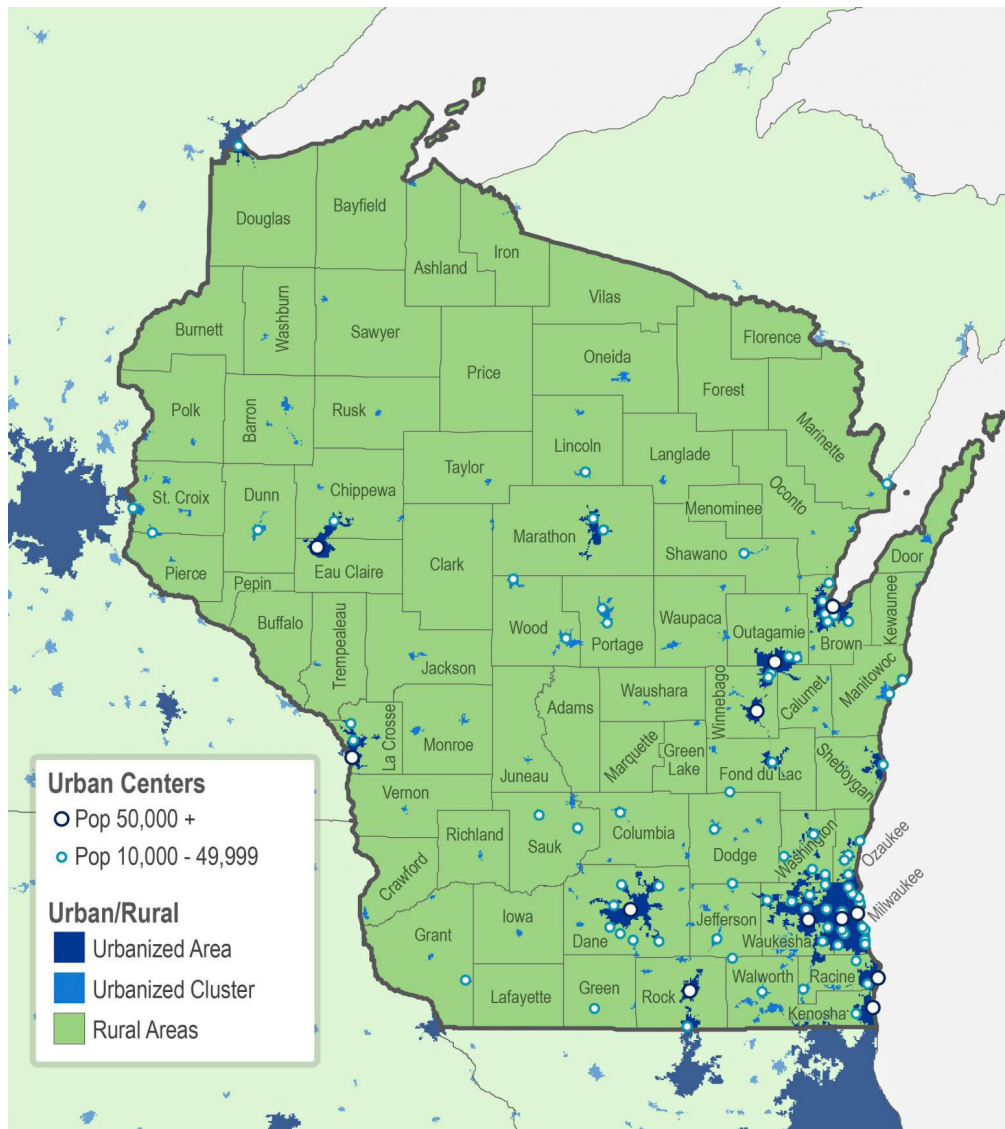
US Census Definition:

The US Census Bureau defines any non-urbanized land as “rural.” Urbanized areas have a population greater than 50,000, while urbanized clusters have population from 2,500–49,999. By this definition, 97% of the land in Wisconsin is considered rural. However, only 30% of Wisconsin’s population lives in a rural area. See Figure L.

(Source: [UW Applied Population Lab](#))



FIGURE L: Urbanized areas, urbanized clusters and non-urban areas, US Census Bureau definition, 2010



(Source: [Putting Rural Wisconsin On The Map](#), UW-Madison Applied Population Lab, 2017)

Wisconsin's Declining Rural Population

Several of Wisconsin's rural counties are projected to lose population over time. According to one [2013 analysis](#) prepared by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Population Laboratory, the following counties in the northern part of the state are projected to lose the greatest percentage of their population by 2040.



TABLE 16: Wisconsin Counties with the Greatest Percent Population Decline 2010–2040

County Name	Census 2010	Projected 2040	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Door	27,785	26,620	-1,165	-4.2%
Buffalo	13,587	13,000	-587	-4.3%
Wood	74,749	71,150	-3,599	-4.8%
Ashland	16,157	15,315	-842	-5.2%
Pepin	7,469	6,885	-584	-7.8%
Iron	5,916	5,420	-496	-8.4%
Bayfield	15,014	13,725	-1,289	-8.6%
Florence	4,423	4,030	-393	-8.9%
Rusk	14,755	13,310	-1,445	-9.8%
Price	14,159	11,645	-2,514	-17.8%

(Source: [Wisconsin's Future Population: Projections for the State, Its Counties, and Municipalities 2010–2040](#), prepared by the UW-Madison Applied Population Laboratory for the Wisconsin Department of Administration, December 2013)

This same study found that Wisconsin's average age will increase from 38.4 to 42.4 across the 30-year time span, with the share of seniors ultimately exceeding the share of children by 2040.

- Ages 0–17: from 23% in 2010 to 21% in 2040
- Ages 18–64: from 63% in 2010 to 55% in 2040
- Ages 65+: from 14% in 2010 to 24% in 2040

An analysis from the Wisconsin Budget Project of these projections found that, while the overall number of children in Wisconsin is projected to grow “modestly” by 2040, the growth will be concentrated in a few populated areas of the state. However, as indicated by Figure M below, **the population of children is expected to decline by as much as 25% in some areas of Northern and Central Wisconsin.**

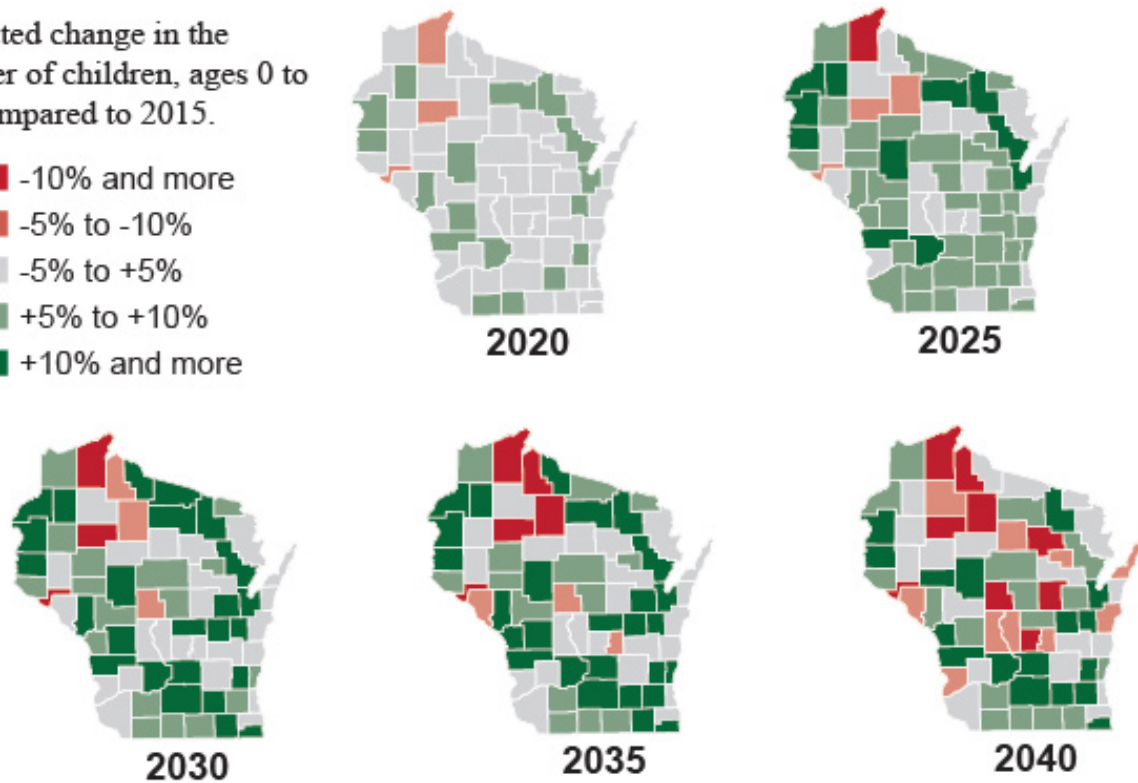


FIGURE M: Projected Change in Number of Children 0 to age 19 by County

Number of Children in Northern Wisconsin Projected to Dwindle

Projected change in the number of children, ages 0 to 19, compared to 2015.

- 10% and more
- 5% to -10%
- 5% to +5%
- +5% to +10%
- +10% and more



(Source: [Rural, Northern Wisconsin Projected to Lose Large Numbers of Children in Coming Years](#), Wisconsin Budget Project 2017)

According to another [analysis](#) from the Wisconsin Budget Project, most Wisconsin counties already had fewer children in 2015 than in 2010. The report found:

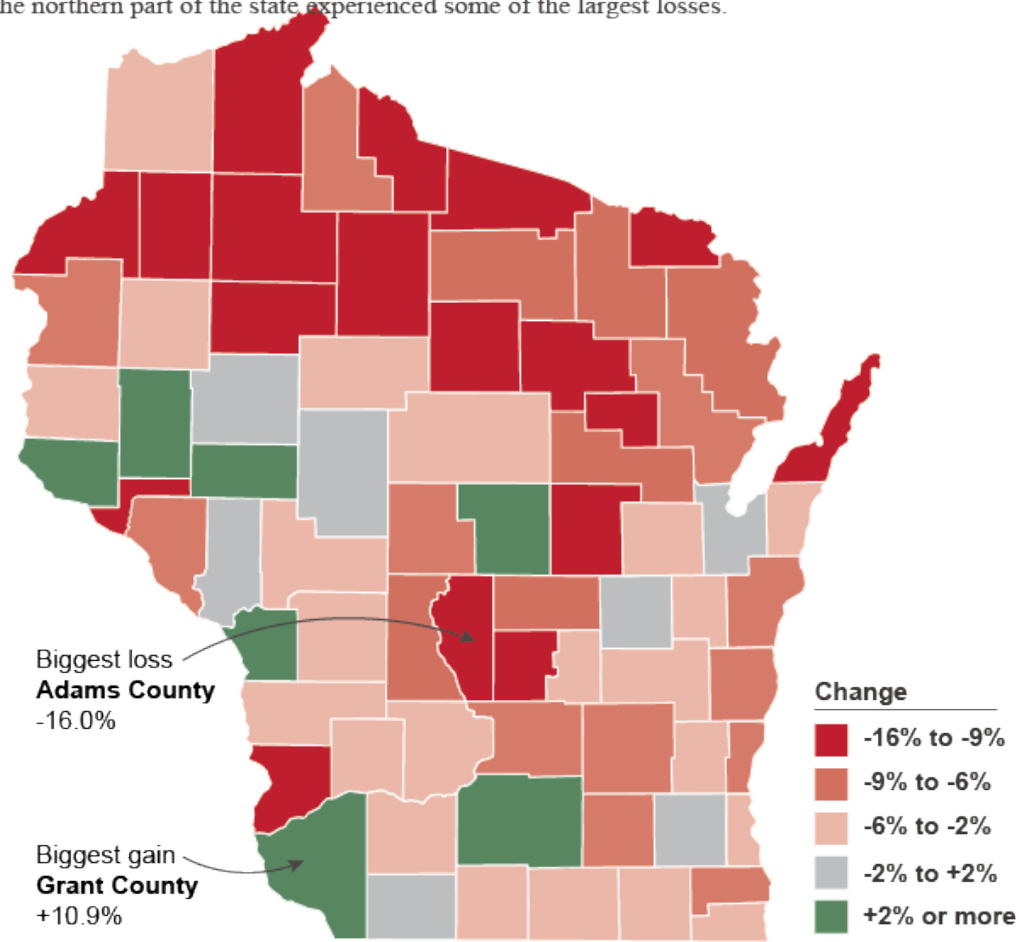
- Between 2010 and 2015, the number of children in Wisconsin declined by about 42,000, from 1.34 million to 1.30 million, for a decline of 3.2%. (See Figure N)
- The decline was most severe in the northern part of the state, with virtually every county in the north experiencing a drop in the number of children. The five counties with the largest child population declines in percentage terms between 2010 and 2015 were Adams County (-16.0%), Iron County (-15.5%), Lincoln County (-14.1%), Bayfield County (-13.3%), and Rusk County (-11.9%). Refer to Appendix B for a labeled map of Wisconsin's counties.



FIGURE N: Percent change in Population ages 0 to 17 years between 2010 and 2015

Most Wisconsin Counties Have Fewer Children than They Did Five Years Ago

Percent change in population ages zero to 17 between 2010 and 2015. Counties in the northern part of the state experienced some of the largest losses.



Source: Wisconsin Department of Health

WISCONSIN BUDGET PROJECT

(Source: [Where are the Kids? Northern Wisconsin Experiences a Significant Decline in the Number of Children](#), Wisconsin Budget Project, 2016)

Declining populations of children in rural areas challenge Wisconsin's early care and education systems and infrastructure in a myriad of ways, particularly when those systems are funded in large part around enrollment. As part of its 2022 Needs Assessment, Wisconsin will invest more time and resources into examining this population of children and identifying opportunities and gaps in how to best meet their needs.



Qualitative Research Findings on Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Underserved Groups

The [UW-Madison Center for Community and Non-Profit Studies](#) summarized their qualitative research for the initial Wisconsin PDG Needs Assessment as follows:

Looking at these findings in sum, we see an overall pattern: The current ECE system in Wisconsin is based on assumptions that fit a dominant model of socioeconomically advantaged, white, monolingual English-speaking, suburban and urban families and the ECE centers they prefer. As such, ECE in Wisconsin systematically underserves any family or provider that does not fit these assumptions, with implications for ECE accessibility, affordability, and quality; the ECE workforce; and COVID-19 impacts and recovery. (Source: [Preschool Development Grant Qualitative Interviews](#))

In their focused interviews exploring differences and similarities among different racial, ethnic, and demographic groups throughout the state, the researchers identified various factors and themes that appear to influence how well the current ECE system serves families' and providers' needs. These factors included: socioeconomic strata, race, culture, communication and language, and geography and transportation. In addition, it has been widely reported in Wisconsin that the COVID-19 pandemic had a disparate impact on Wisconsinites based on their membership in demographic groups by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. (Source: [DHS](#)) This research affirmed those disparities.

Finally, it is worth noting that numerous primary caregivers and providers from the interviewed groups (African American, Latinx, Hmong, Tribal communities, and white rural) identified communication barriers including too many and confusing websites to navigate and a lack of linguistically— and culturally—competent professionals who could support them with necessary information. These communication issues affected parents and providers, and related to supporting children with developmental delays or disabilities, as well as use of The Registry, Child Care Resource & Referral agencies, Department of Public Instruction special education guidance, YoungStar ratings, and continuing education requirements.

The researchers offered a variety of recommendations in their report, which are presented on pp. 25–26 of [the report](#).

Looking Ahead to the 2022 Comprehensive Needs Assessment

As part of its 2022 Needs Assessment, Wisconsin will take a much deeper look into each of the populations it has defined as vulnerable or underserved, and consider whether additional populations—such as children born to minor parents—should also be included in the definition. In addition, Wisconsin will place a substantial focus on rural children as part of this assessment, including where they live in the state and their characteristics in terms of race/ethnicity, language spoken at home, recency of immigration, poverty, and low-income status. As indicated above, while Wisconsin has detailed information on many of the populations it has defined as vulnerable or underserved, data are more limited on children of incarcerated parents, children from military-connected families, and may be even further limited when looking specifically at children B-5.



Given the significant racial differences across indicators for poverty, education, health, and housing, it will also be critical to examine the impact of structural and systemic racism on the experience and outcomes of children and families in the ECE and broader B-5 ECSS systems. In addition, given the strong interdependence between maternal health and child outcomes (such as infant mortality and low birth weight), and the significant racial disparities that exist within these domains, Wisconsin will examine the crucial role that the intersection of maternal and child health plays in overall child well-being and look to strengthen connections and synergies within and across programs in DHS, DCF and DPI that are holistically serving pregnant women, mothers, and their children across the state.

As identified above, it is imperative that Wisconsin successfully engage families, specifically vulnerable or underserved families and provide a system that is culturally responsive. Wisconsin will research how B-5 systems are engaging efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable populations, dual-language learners, and families of children with disabilities across Wisconsin's diverse regions and communities. Identifying barriers families experience while entering, navigating, and engaging with the B-5 system.

The goal of the needs assessment will be to provide a holistic picture not only of the availability and quality of existing ECE programs in the state, but also a view into the intersectionality of child well-being, disparities, community resources, and barriers faced by the B-5 population that can inform strategic planning. Armed with more specific data about who Wisconsin's vulnerable or underserved children are—along with what services they may or may not be receiving, Wisconsin will be better positioned to engage stakeholders throughout the B-5 ECSS to ensure all children and families have access to the high-quality early care and education services they need to thrive.



III. NUMBER OF CHILDREN BEING SERVED AND AWAITING SERVICES

What data does Wisconsin have describing children being served in existing ECE programs?

Wisconsin’s ECE programs include:

- regulated and unregulated child care programs (including family/friend/neighbor programs);
- Head Start/Early Head Start programs;
- pre-kindergarten programs (Title I preschools, school district-sponsored three-year-old kindergarten (3K) programs);
- four-year-old kindergarten (4K) programs;
- home visiting programs;
- early intervention programs; and
- Early childhood special education programs.

Three state agencies (DCF, DPI, DHS), and 11 federally recognized Tribal Nations located in Wisconsin oversee relevant laws in these areas and work together to support children ages B-5. A brief overview of these programs, including unduplicated enrollment data for individual programs, is provided in Table 17 below:

TABLE 17: Overview of Wisconsin ECE Programs

Child Care	
Description	
DCF oversees child care programming, funding, data collection, and compliance in Wisconsin. DCF measures the quality of DCF-regulated ECE programs through its quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), YoungStar. Participating programs receive a Star rating between 1 (lowest quality) and 5 (highest quality) Programs must participate in YoungStar in order to accept Wisconsin Shares state subsidy payments from families. Programs are considered to be high-quality if rated 3 Star or higher. 52% of YoungStar programs were high-quality in 2018.	
Funding Source(s)	Children Served
Federal funds (e.g., Child Care Development Fund (CCDF); Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), state General Purpose Revenue (GPR), and private pay tuition.	In 2018, approximately 217,000 children attended regulated child care settings. 19% were from families receiving public child care assistance through the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program. Over 74% of children from families receiving Wisconsin Shares were enrolled in 3 Star or higher programs in 2018, up from 56% in 2013. (Source: DCF)



Head Start	
Description DCF serves as the connection point between Wisconsin and Head Start and Early Head Start programming. As of 2018, 223 Head Start programs participated in YoungStar and are monitored via the federal Administration for Children and Families. DCF holds the Head Start Collaboration Office federal grant.	
Funding Source(s) Federal funding (Head Start, MIECHV), state GPR-funded Head Start State Supplement program (administered by DPI).	Children Served In 2018, Head Start and Early Head Start served over 16,400 children (13,497 through Head Start and 2,940 through Early Head Start). (Source: DPI)
Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)	
Description School districts receive state aid and revenue limit authority for 4K students, who are counted as 0.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) or 0.6 FTE (if an additional 87.5 hours of family outreach activities are provided). 4K is provided either in a district site (e.g., school) or as part of a 4K Community Approach (4KCA) in which the district contracts with community partners (e.g., child care, Head Start).	
Funding Source(s) State general school aids, local property tax revenue, and a combination of other state and federal sources that support specific children or categorical programs.	Children Served In 2018-19, nearly 56,000 students enrolled in voluntary public 4K provided by Wisconsin school districts. Over 98% of Wisconsin school districts that provide education to elementary grades (411) offered 4K programming (406), and an estimated 75% of Wisconsin four-year-olds participate in a local program in 2018. (Source: DPI)



Collaborative Approaches

Description

Many Wisconsin ECE programs have formed local collaborations that include a combination of child care, Head Start, and/or 4K. Communities develop models responsive to their needs while blending and braiding funding to maximize resources, including funding, staffing, and infrastructure.

Funding Source(s)

Blended and braided funding* sources from child care, K-12 school districts, and Head Start sites.

Children Served

In 2018, over 34,500 children were served. Approximately 30% of school districts and 42% of Head Start sites offered programming through a collaborative approach, in partnership with 254 local child care sites. (Source: DPI)

*Blended and braided funding is the combining of two or more funding sources to support a program or activity.

Services for Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delays

Description

Birth to 3: For children ages birth to three, Wisconsin's Birth to 3 early intervention program provides services to children with developmental delays and disabilities. The program is managed at the state level by DHS and administered locally by counties.

Funding Source(s)

Federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Part C, Medicaid, state GPR, county funds, community aids, private insurance reimbursement, and parental cost sharing.

Children Served

In 2018, about 22,500 children were served (new enrollments, ongoing participants, eligible children who did not enroll, and children referred who were determined to be ineligible). (Source: DHS, LFB)

Description

Early Childhood Special Education Services (ECSE): For children ages 3-5, Wisconsin school districts provide ECSE as part of a continuum of services for children with disabilities. Children are evaluated on eligibility criteria and may receive services as part of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). ECSE is managed at the state level by DPI and administered locally by school districts.

Funding Source(s)

IDEA Part B, state special education categorical aid, state general aid, and local property taxes.

Children Served

In 2018-19, approximately 16,400 children received early childhood special education services. (Source: DPI)



Home Visiting

Description

Wisconsin’s Family Foundations Home Visiting Program (FFHV), led by DCF in partnership with DHS, is a voluntary home-based program that aims to strengthen parent skills to improve the lives of their children and families as early as pregnancy. Home visitors partner with caregivers to promote social, emotional, and physical development and overall family well-being.

Funding Source(s)

Federal Title V Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), TANF, and state GPR.

Children Served

In 2018, over 2,000 families were served through nearly 23,400 visits in 31 counties and 5 tribes in 2018. (Source: DHS)

(Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG Application, 2019](#))

Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)

According to [DPI](#), “In 2011, the State of Wisconsin committed to developing an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) to support regular data exchanges as well as ad hoc research requests. Early childhood data linkages have been established between the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Wisconsin ECIDS was implemented in December of 2017 and is now available for use by DPI, DCF and DHS personnel.”

Originally created through a Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant, Wisconsin’s ECIDS supports agency staff, policymakers, and researchers in answering questions and evaluating ECE programs and services in order to improve service delivery and outcomes for young children and their families. To get a better picture of how Wisconsin’s children are served and how these children fare as they grow through childhood, the three departments are using ECIDS to take advantage of their combined wealth of data to support the development of Wisconsin’s 2022 Needs Assessment.

Annual, Distinct, Unduplicated Count of Children Receiving ECE Services

As part of its efforts under PDG and PDG-R, Wisconsin is using ECIDS to create an annual distinct count of children being served in ECE programs throughout the state. While unduplicated counts exist for individual programs, this is the state’s first effort to pull all of the data together to help identify which children are receiving ECE services, including children who access programs and services administered by different agencies. This annual, distinct count of children participating in ECE programs throughout the state will then be analyzed by characteristics such as age, geography, socioeconomic status, language, disability, and other child well-being indicators.

Per a finalized cross-agency data sharing agreement, the following data elements will be accessed as part of this request:



TABLE 18: Distinct Count of Children B-5 ECIDS Cross-Agency Data Element Description

Department	Program	Participation	Data Characteristics
DPI	5-Year Kindergarten	Enrolled in 2018–2019	School District Free/Reduced Lunch Status Disability Status English Language Learner (ELL) Status Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Status
DPI	4-Year Kindergarten	Enrolled in 4K and born in 2013–2104	School District Free/Reduced Lunch Status Disability Status English Language Learner (ELL) Status Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Status
DPI	Special Education Pre-K	Had an IEP for Early Childhood Special Education	School District
DHS	Wisconsin EHDI (Early Hearing Detection & Intervention)	Diagnosis of permanent hearing loss	Birth to 3 program status
DHS	Birth Records	Count of Live Births in 2013–2014	Date of Birth Maternal race/ethnicity Maternal education County of residence
DHS	Lead	Screenings results	Screening positive Screening negative Testing method Results for positive screen
DHS	Immunization Registry	Immunization up-to-date 2 years Immunization up-to-date 5 years	County and ZIP code of residence



DHS	Dental Sealants	Screened Yes/No	Insurance Status Special Health Care Need
DCF	Wisconsin Shares	Authorization for Child Care	Provider Rating Child's Race/Ethnicity Child's sex/gender
DHS/DCF	FFHV	Participated in FFHV	FFHV Program Program Location
DCF	Child Welfare	Initial Assessment Out-of-Home Care Placement	Substantiated/unsubstantiated

In this effort, one of Wisconsin's biggest data gaps is that Head Start data is not maintained by the state and not available for inclusion in the ECIDS data request. To address this gap, Wisconsin began piloting a Head Start data collection effort under PDG, and will continue this effort under PDG-R. As part of this effort and in partnership with two pilot Head Start agencies, DCF has begun integrating pilot Head Start data into its LIFT data system. As Head Start data becomes available in the future, it can then be added to Wisconsin's annual, distinct count of children awaiting services. However, until that time, the lack of integrated data on children participating in Head Start will be a significant gap in Wisconsin's analysis of children receiving services. Currently the majority of Head Start programs are participating in YoungStar and DCF licensing regulation. By September 2021, all Head Start programs will be required to be participating in their states QRIS as well as fingerprint background checks. This align with Wisconsin's pilot will ensure data alignment and ability to access participation data.

What data does Wisconsin have for children awaiting services?

Many of Wisconsin's core ECE programs serve all children and families who qualify (e.g., 4K, early intervention and early childhood special education programs). Unlike several other states, the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program has provided benefits to all eligible families with no waiting lists since the program's inception in the 1990s. (Source: [Are We at the Crossroads for Wisconsin Child Care?](#), KidsForward) Even though many of Wisconsin's core ECE programs serve all children and families who qualify, there may be many reasons why uptake of a particular program is less than 100%. Moving forward, DCF and IRP will partner to explore program up-take, including measuring demand and potential solutions to ensure children and families who qualify access services.

However, across the state there are likely many children waiting for a spot in a regulated child care program. In partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Applied Population Lab and IRP, child care deserts were identified around Wisconsin. During the analysis Applied Population Lab analyzed the availability of regulated child care within a 20-minute drive time of an estimated family location with children under age 5. This found that for every two children under age 5 in Wisconsin there is only one space at a regulated child care program



with in a 20-minute drive time from the family's approximate location. In rural areas the number of child care deserts increases with an average 3.4 children for every spot. Even in the most urban areas of the state where regulated child care programs tend to be concentrated, there are 1.7 children for every spot. (Source: [Geographic Access to Child Care in Wisconsin](#))

As noted above, Wisconsin is currently piloting Head Start data collection, but does not yet centrally collect information on waiting lists maintained by Head Start. Similarly, information about waiting lists at individual child care programs is not centrally collected at the state level.

In 2017, DCF partnered with the University of Wisconsin (UW) Survey Center to conduct a survey of Wisconsin's regulated child care providers, generating information on a variety of topics. The survey found the following with respect to waitlists and regional trends:

“Waitlists: Forty-five percent of respondents reported at least one child on their waitlist. Licensed family and certified child care programs reported over 50% of their waitlist was occupied by infants under 1 year old, compared to licensed group child care programs who reported 34% of their waitlist was occupied by infants. Licensed group child care programs reported a median of 8 infants currently on their waitlist with a range of 1–110 infants on the waitlist. Respondents reported that infants wait an average 6 to 12 months on the waitlist before receiving a slot. Waitlist data for children of other ages suggests that waitlists are less common for toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children.

Regional trends: When respondent data is viewed at the regional level, three regions show unique differences compared to the other region respondents. Data suggests the Western region, and the Northern region to a lesser extent, may be experiencing access issues. In contrast in the Southeastern region, certified and licensed family programs are focused on hiring additional teachers, and parents are more likely to access care without needing to remain on a waitlist.

Waitlists, capacity, and vacancies: Western region respondents report the highest proportion of waitlist to licensed capacity and the lowest number of average full-time vacancies per program. Respondents in the Western region report maintaining, on average, 65% of their licensed capacity on a waitlist, with an average of 8 children on the waitlist. The Western region also has the lowest average reported full-time vacancies per program, 3 full-time vacancies, second only to the Northern region reporting an average of 2 full-time vacancies per program. These factors combined suggest that families located in the Western region may be experiencing greater difficulty locating child care than families living in other regions of the state.

The Southeastern region is the only region that has more programs reporting a full-time vacancy than programs reporting a waitlist. The Western region maintains the highest proportion of infants on program waitlists with an average of 52% of the programs' waitlists occupied by infants. The Northern region reports a slightly longer waitlist than other regions with 30% of respondents reporting infants waiting between 12 and 18 months before receiving a slot. All other regions have the majority of respondents reporting infants waiting 6 to 12 months before receiving a slot.” (Source: UW Comprehensive Market Rate Survey Analysis, Part 2; UW Survey Center, 2017)



What are the strengths and weaknesses of Wisconsin's data on children being served?

As noted above, Wisconsin has extensive data on children being served in its ECE programs and services, and an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). The strength of Wisconsin's data and the existence of the ECIDS are significant assets in Wisconsin's efforts to evaluate the strengths and needs of ECE programs and services.

Wisconsin also has the advantage of its partnership with IRP. IRP develops and administers the [WI Administrative Data Core](#), longitudinal administrative data from multiple Wisconsin state agencies. It is one of the richest collections of linked administrative data in the country that supports evidence-based policymaking and allows for research and evaluation across multiple programs and outcomes that would not be possible using only a single agency's data. (Source: IRP, [Wisconsin Administrative Data Core \(WADC\)](#))

While the state is in a position of strength when it comes to ECE data, there are several challenges, including but not limited to:

Lack of Head Start data at the state level: As noted above, Head Start data is not yet collected at the state level and is not part of the ECIDS. Wisconsin is actively working to address data limitations with respect to Head Start. As a first priority, it is using PDG funds to pilot migration of Head Start data into DCF's LIFT system. In parallel to these efforts, the Head Start Collaboration Office five year goals include an initiative to ensure Head Start data is further integrated into the state's child care administration data systems like other ECE programs, and that the state's child care administration system operationally understands and is inclusive of the nuances of the Head Start system, programs, and policies.

Lack of persistent IDs in ECIDS: Currently, each agency participating in ECIDS identifies program participants in a distinct way. ECIDS combines these data, creating a unique ID for the individual during the de-identification process that is maintained in the system. However, for each subsequent research request, a separate research ID is assigned to each client/student included in the request, making it unusable across multiple research requests.

To address this issue, Wisconsin is using PDG funds to develop a solution that will maintain these unique IDs across requests to track children and families over time and across ECIDS requests. Using PDG funds, Wisconsin aims to enhance the ECIDS User Portal by designing, building, testing, and implementing the ability for IDs that are persistent (i.e., will remain the same) from one Data Request to another. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Other Data Limitations

Due to governance, local control, and other factors, Wisconsin has other data limitations in evaluating its ECE programs. For example:

- There is no one measure of "quality" across ECE. While Wisconsin has a quality measure for child care through its QRIS, YoungStar. Head Start has its own performance standards, and 4K programs are accountable to local school districts.



- Enrollment data is not available for regulated child care programs.
- While enrollment data is available, information about the characteristics of 4K programs (e.g., which programs are full day, half day, certain days of the week, etc.) or school district-based 3K programs are not collected in a uniform way by the state. DPI is working to address differences in definitions and program descriptions to improve data collection and use.
- Data to evaluate school readiness and/or transitions from ECE into the early grades is locally driven. As a state with a strong tradition of local control, Wisconsin does not have a comprehensive, multi-faceted kindergarten-entry assessment (KEA) and no measures of non-academic subjects. State-required standardized assessments begin in 3rd grade (reading) and 4th grade (reading, math, social studies, science). State law requires an annual assessment for reading readiness for each pupil in grades 4K–2. However, while Wisconsin statutes required school districts to administer a reading readiness assessment in the early grades from 2013-2016, state law was changed for the 2016-17 school year to provide school districts discretion over which assessment to administer. (Source: DPI)
- Data on race and ethnicity is missing for many children and families receiving services from the DCF. This data is captured in DCF's Longitudinal Information on Family Touchpoints (LIFT) tool which matches data from DCF's programs, creating a holistic view of services a child or parent received (Source: DCF)
- Data on capacity by age group in each regulated child care program is not readily available.
- DCF does not maintain data on legal or illegal unregulated child care programs.
- DCF does not have information on how many families are priced out of the regulated child care market.



IV. ECE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY

Birth to age five is the most critical time in a child's development. A wide body of research shows that children who experience engaging, one-on-one activities and safe, healthy and nurturing learning environments have a better chance at lifelong success. They are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to engage in criminal activity or participate in special education programs, and often earn higher wages throughout their lifetime. (Source: [DCF](#))

In line with its vision that all Wisconsin families will have access to high-quality, affordable, local ECE opportunities, Wisconsin's 2020 [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#)—used data analysis, listening sessions, and community interviews to focus primarily on analyzing ECE access, quality, affordability, and workforce. The findings of this initial 2020 effort are summarized below (but are also detailed extensively in the full report). Further, the 2020 effort included a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) within these four frames (access, affordability, quality, workforce). As previously noted, the 2020 Needs Assessment Summary and Strategic Plan had a distinct focus on child care, which is reflected in the information summarized below. Going forward into 2022, Wisconsin will explicitly focus on broadening its focus to include all aspects of its ECE programs and the B-5 ECSS.

What are Wisconsin's ECE current strengths in terms of quality of care across settings?

Wisconsin ECE stakeholders recognize that consistent, responsive care is the foundation to brain development and lays the groundwork for a child's whole life. During their first five years, Wisconsin's children can potentially be involved with multiple programs across multiple agencies. As outlined throughout this report, Wisconsin has a long history of strong ECE programs and collaborations and has worked to expand access to high-quality ECE programs in communities across the state.

YoungStar: YoungStar, Wisconsin's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), is one way that Wisconsin is working to improve the quality of care for Wisconsin's youngest children. According to DCF, YoungStar drives quality improvement in child care throughout the state of Wisconsin by:

- Helping providers who want to improve the quality of their care;
- Creating financial incentives (i.e., micro grants) that encourage providers to deliver better services to children;
- [Giving parents the meaningful information](#) they need to make informed child care decisions for their children at home and away from home; and

As outlined in the 2020 [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#):

- High-quality care is defined as a 3–5 Star YoungStar rating.
- In February 2020, 69% of children participating in Wisconsin Shares were enrolled in 3–5 Star child care programs.
- 41% of programs have a 3–5 Star rating, the majority of which are Licensed Group programs (67%).
- High-quality programs are not equally distributed across the state, leading to inequitable access to quality care options.



- The majority of high-quality rated programs are center-based, which typically costs more, leaving some families unable to afford high-quality care even if it is available in their area. 19% of DCF-regulated child care programs do not participate in YoungStar and so are not rated.

According to a more recent look at data—DCF’s YoungStar [Monthly Report for March 2021](#):

- As of March 2021, 87% (n=3,754) of Wisconsin’s 4,321 DCF-regulated child care programs were participating in YoungStar. Over half (53%) of regulated child care programs participating in YoungStar are high-quality (when programs whose rating is pending are excluded). Table 19 and Table 20.

TABLE 19: Percent of YoungStar Program Participation by Region (March 2021)

	1 Star	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Pending	Total
Kenosha/Racine	0%	3%	2%	0%	1%	1%	6%
Milwaukee	0%	14%	10%	2%	2%	7%	34%
Northeastern	0%	6%	5%	1%	2%	1%	16%
Northern	0%	3%	2%	0%	1%	1%	7%
Southern	0%	10%	5%	2%	6%	1%	24%
Western	0%	7%	4%	0%	2%	1%	13%
Total	0%	42%	28%	6%	13%	11%	100%

TABLE 20: Count of YoungStar Program Participation by Region (March 2021)

	1 Star	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Pending	Total
Kenosha/Racine	0	94	65	6	21	27	213
Milwaukee	7	511	359	66	82	262	1,287
Northeastern	0	242	201	39	82	27	591
Northern	0	120	85	16	37	21	279
Southern	1	364	206	73	207	46	897
Western	0	245	136	17	63	26	487
Total	8	1,576	1,052	217	492	409	3,754



- The majority of children whose families receive Wisconsin Shares attend a high-quality program (3 Star or higher). Table 21 and Table 22 below summarize the number of children receiving Wisconsin Shares in a YoungStar-rated program by age and star rating.

TABLE 21: Percent of Wisconsin Shares Participation by YoungStar Rating (March 2021)

	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Pending	Total
0–2 Years	4%	6%	1%	3%	2%	16%
2–4 Years	6%	10%	2%	5%	2%	26%
4–6 Years	6%	9%	2%	5%	2%	23%
6–12 Years	11%	12%	2%	4%	3%	33%
12–17 Years	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Total	29%	37%	7%	18%	10%	100%

TABLE 22: Count of Wisconsin Shares Participation by YoungStar Rating (March 2021)

	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star	Pending	Total
0–2 Years	1,505	2,016	407	1,067	727	5,722
2–4 Years	2,302	3,428	710	1,940	769	9,149
4–6 Years	2,087	3,100	626	1,743	683	8,239
6–12 Years	3,981	4,308	705	1,544	1,163	11,701
12–17 Years	317	300	41	68	85	811
Total	10,192	13,152	2,489	6,362	3,427	35,622

What are Wisconsin's key gaps in quality of care across settings?

One of the largest gaps in understanding quality is that there is no single measure or metric to define “quality” across ECE programs in Wisconsin. While Wisconsin has a quality measure for child care through YoungStar, there are several ECE programs and services that do not participate in YoungStar, and thus are not measured in the same way.

For example, while some 4K programs that participate in a Community Approach program also participate in YoungStar, 4K programs that are solely operated through school districts have different quality, professional development, and accountability provisions per their individual local school boards. As a result, while



substantial work has been done to define and measure quality in the context of YoungStar, a percentage of the state's B-5 population is not currently being served in a YoungStar-rated program.

When examining gaps as defined by YoungStar, other key gaps and concerns are present. For example:

- Under the YoungStar definition, the number of low-income families choosing high-quality programs is dropping.
- The operation of both unregulated legal and illegal child care is present statewide and affects regulated programs' ability to compete in terms of tuition and enrollment.
- Information on and the approximately 175,000 children from families who pay for care without Wisconsin Shares assistance is also unknown.
(Source: [Wisconsin's PDG Application, 2019](#))

The information gathered during from the [PDG Listening Sessions](#) and [Community Interviews](#) inform state and local partners of families' definitions of quality and how it may drive their ECE choice or preference. Additionally, Wisconsin recognizes that high-quality ECE requires:

- Inclusivity;
- Cultural competence and cultural responsiveness in its programming and family engagement; and
- Additional aspects of quality that are important to families (including how they determine which child care programs are safe and trustworthy for their children) and should be considered, measured, and incentivized wherever possible. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG Application, 2019](#))

According to feedback from PDG Listening Sessions:

- The majority of regional participants believes that quality care exists in their area. However, tribal participants described both a lack of access to overall care and high-quality care.
- Quality was described in terms of: school readiness, developmentally appropriate, play-based, whole-child approach, safe, clean, trained/qualified staff, supported staff, culturally responsive, diverse, representative of community, access, transportation, affordability, community connections, social-emotional health/development, social interactions, trauma-informed care, family engagement, family-teacher relationships, trust, infant mental health and culture.

According to feedback from PDG Community Interviews:

- Caregivers wanted assurance that providers would take good care of their children. Interviewees expressed that they trusted family more than outside providers and that they were likely to trust providers of their own race or ethnicity more than providers who weren't.
- Quality was described as safe spaces in a safe neighborhood with well-trained staff who were supportive of emotional well-being.



- Black, Latinx, and Hmong caregivers wanted to see more diverse providers and more representation of culture and identity, including linguistic diversity. They felt that white providers sometimes struggled to affirm children’s racial identities and their parenting.
- Parents also wanted curricula and materials (e.g., children’s books) to affirm their children’s racial identities. Hmong and Tribal parents and providers in particular noted the lack of cultural resources including foods, books and cultural holidays incorporated into the ECE setting. Providers referred to difficulty in finding funding to acquire cultural resources or engage in cultural activities.
- Parents and providers, especially from Tribal communities, noted that the current state system, including regulations and quality standards, could come into conflict with more culturally-rooted models of care. Hmong interviewees pointed out that informal/unregulated family care can be high-quality but these providers need support, including monetary, education, social, and mental health support and recognition in the state licensing system.
- For some providers, YoungStar seemed to systematically undervalue the quality of their programs, including the characteristics that drove families to seek them out (e.g., a racially— and culturally— diverse staff), and by tying YoungStar to Wisconsin Shares, systematically undervalued them financially as well. Some providers spoke of the YoungStar program as a mechanism for large, well-resourced centers to continue to accrue resources, while other providers offering highly-valued quality of different kinds struggle further to survive.

According to the 2020–21 WIDA review of YoungStar Evaluation Criteria:

- To truly promote equity and support for multilingual children and their families, YoungStar would need additions and edits. Its Family Engagement section within Business and Professional Practices was the only YoungStar indicator with any reference to racial and cultural diversity in its items or practices. However, explicit references and examples of practices to promote equity, cultural and linguistic responsiveness are needed throughout the system, and could also be strengthened within the Family Engagement Indicator.
- DCF should consider a systemic approach to supporting multilingual children and their families. Any enhancement of YoungStar to address WIDA’s concerns will likely result in additional needs, such as: workforce professional learning on related topics; intentional recruitment of new workforce to reflect the languages and cultures of families served; enhancement of family engagement definitions and supports; hiring or training of YoungStar Consultants to support faithful evaluation of the intent of any updated criteria; and development of support resources or tools to guide providers as they work to increase their programs’ linguistic and cultural responsiveness.



What are Wisconsin's key gaps in availability?

As noted above, Wisconsin is evaluating "availability" by examining access, affordability, quality, and workforce, with a focus on equity and inclusion (which were defined earlier in this report).

ACCESS

Over the past decade:

- Licensed family child care programs declined by 68%.
- Licensed family child care program capacity has declined by 51%.
- Licensed group child care centers declined by 9%.
- Licensed group child care center capacity has increased by 10%.
- Fewer regulated child care programs are participating in YoungStar,
- Families participating in Wisconsin Shares child care are disproportionately impacted, as they must enroll their children in a regulated YoungStar participating child care program.

(Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research and Poverty; DCF)

4K: Further, while nearly 99% of school districts offer 4K programs, one in four four-year-olds do not participate in a 4K program. Since many 4K programs are only offered half days and may not be offered every day of the week, working families face barriers in accessing 4K programs and securing wrap-around care.

Access to Infant/Toddler Care: Wisconsin likely faces the most significant shortage of regulated child care for infants and toddlers, including access to non-standard hour care (evening, overnight, weekend), and lacks overall care choices for families. According to an [analysis by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research and Poverty \(IRP\)](#), capacity in licensed family child care programs has declined by 51%. This decline impacts family choice and ability to access regulated child care. Licensed family child care are more affordable (Source: [2018 Market Rate Survey](#)), more likely to offer non-standard hour care and can be the preferred choice of families with infants.

Further, as described in greater detail on page 73 below, the number of children participating in the Wisconsin Shares Child Care subsidy program declined by over 35% from 2008-2018, with the greatest declines among infants and toddlers, for whom participation declined 56%.

Declines in licensed family and certified programs: Under PDG, IRP analyzed [Wisconsin child care capacity](#) from 2004-2019, and found that overall capacity has remained relatively stable. However,

- The number of slots in licensed group settings increased by 10% (nearly 13,000 slots), while **licensed family capacity declined by 51%** (more than 15,000 fewer slots).
- Overall, in the most rural counties, child capacity has fallen, and much of the decrease is in licensed family settings. Unlike the most urban counties, this decrease in family capacity is not offset by increasing licensed group capacity, which has had a small decline.

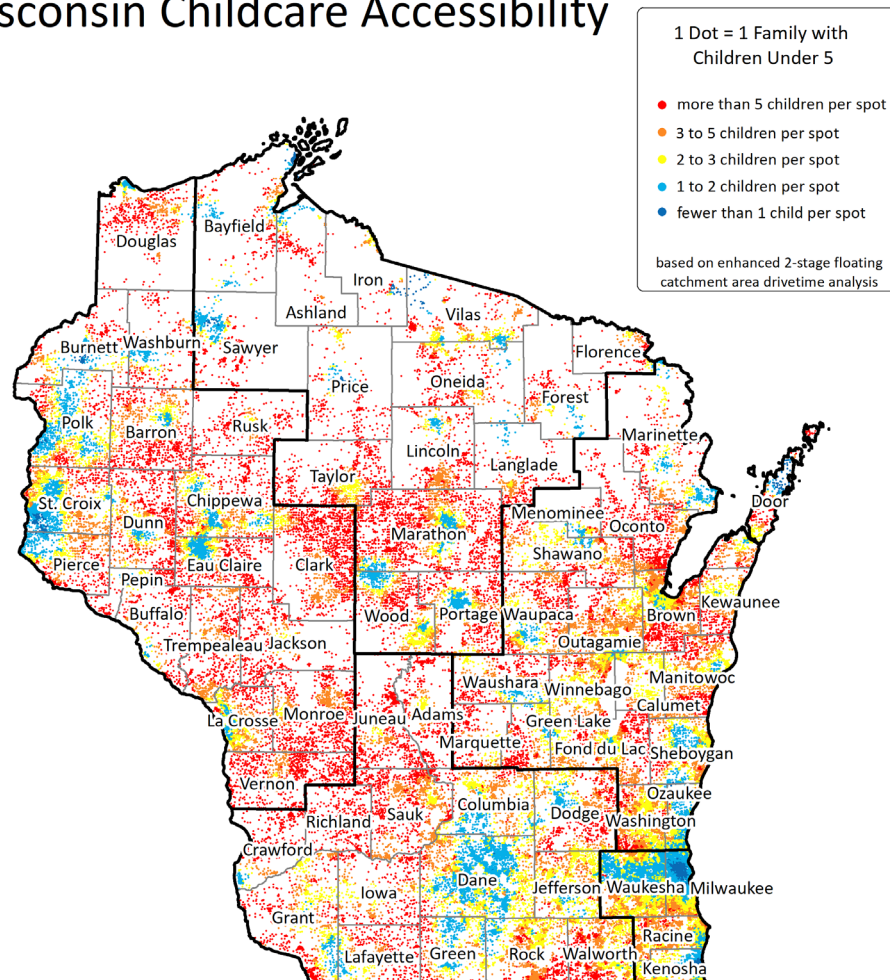


Child Care Deserts: As described above, according to the UW-Applied Population Lab, there are approximately two children under the age of 5 for every one spot in regulated child care within a 20 minute drive time of the family's location. A map of Wisconsin's child care deserts can be seen in Figure O below. A child care desert is defined as any area where there are 3 or more children for every one regulated child care spot. In Wisconsin's rural areas the number of child care deserts increases with an average 3.4 children for every spot. There are particular areas of the state that are experiencing the higher concentrations of children living in child care deserts. For example, there are, on average, 7.3 children for every one regulated child care spot in Vernon County. (Source: [Geographic Access to Child Care in Wisconsin](#))

Even families who are not indicated as experiencing a child care desert under this definition may still lack access to child care that they prefer or can afford. Understanding the number of families that are priced out of the regulated child care market is essential to understanding access in Wisconsin. According to the Center for American Progress, the estimated annual state economic benefit of having affordable child care statewide is over \$3 billion. (Source: [Wisconsin Early Learning Fact Sheet](#), Center for American Progress)

FIGURE O: Wisconsin's Child Care Deserts as of February 2020

Wisconsin Childcare Accessibility



(Source: [Geographic Access to Child Care in Wisconsin](#), UW-Applied Population Lab)



During the 2020 Listening Sessions:

- Participants described a lack of child care available across Wisconsin and a lack of access to the care that does exist.
- Access disproportionately impacts families with infants and toddlers, children with special needs, children of color, and families working non-standard hour care.
- Access issues included transportation, wait lists of more than a year or with up to hundreds of families, and COVID-19's impact.
- Lack of affordability.
- During the Virtual Regional Listening Sessions, 92% of participants said child care was not accessible.
- The Southeastern Region had the highest percentage of responses indicating that quality care was accessible (18%) while the Western Region had the lowest (3%).

During the 2020 Community Interviews:

- Interviewees expressed needing more accessible hours that match parents' work schedules including earlier start times, extended after-school hours, evening, and weekend hours.
- Providers across all demographic groups described issues with the complexities and lack of transparency across child care systems and partner agencies (i.e., The Registry, YoungStar, DCF, DPI).
- Caregivers described difficulties navigating child care systems, particularly for children with special needs.
- Interviewees noted a lack of ECE system information and support available in people's primary languages, especially Spanish and Hmong, to assist parents in finding care and accessing subsidies, and to assist providers in licensing, regulations, YoungStar, and other necessary information for their programs.
- Rural white families described a lack of child care within a reasonable distance from home.
- Hmong parents and providers noted the lack of cultural resources including Hmong foods, books and cultural holidays incorporated into the ECE setting.
- Latinx families expressed the value of care provided in Spanish or bilingually and that it is not always available to them.



AFFORDABILITY (with connections to ACCESS and QUALITY)

According to the 2020 [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#):

- The average price of infant care is more than \$12,000 per year. Average in-state tuition for a four-year public college is \$8,475 and average annual rent is \$9,994.
- The average price of infant care represents 18.5% of the median family income in Wisconsin (\$67,786), and 83.3% of the yearly wages of a minimum wage worker (\$15,080). (Source: [Wisconsin Early Learning Factsheet](#), Center for American Progress, 2019)
- In 2018, 36,851 children B-5 received a Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy. The majority of children receiving Wisconsin Shares live in the Madison and Milwaukee areas.
- The gap between the Wisconsin Shares subsidy rate and the price of care may still leave families unable to afford care.
- Children receiving Wisconsin Shares must enroll in YoungStar-participating child care. Families unable to access a YoungStar-participating provider may be unable to access Wisconsin Shares.
- Households making less than median income, particularly single parent households and families of color, pay an even greater percentage of their income for child care.
- Not all families who qualify for Wisconsin Shares participate.

4K is paid for by Wisconsin and located in 99% of the state. 4K serves as an affordable option for families, although these programs are part-day in most instances, potentially leaving families to cover the cost of wrap-around child care.

The Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program supports eligible families by funding a portion of the cost of child care while the parents are working or participating in an approved activity. As part of Wisconsin's Child Care Development Block Grant Implementation Research Grant which is examining the Impact of [CCDBG Policies](#) on child care access, continuity, and parental employment for families receiving Wisconsin Shares a [microsimulation analysis](#) was conducted by the Urban Institute in May 2020. According to the Urban Institute,

“The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides child care subsidies to families with low incomes, helping them access affordable child care so that parents can work or participate in education or other approved activities. In Wisconsin, we estimate 175,500 children in 100,300 families are eligible to participate in CCDF in the average month. When we compare the eligibility estimates to the number of families and children who participate in CCDF, we estimate 18% of eligible children participate and 19% of eligible families participate.”

During the 2020 Listening Sessions:

- The majority of Listening Sessions reported that quality care is not affordable. During the Virtual Regional Listening Sessions, participants in the Northern and Southeastern Regions reported that affordable care does not exist at all.



- Several themes emerged including:
 - the discrepancy between the price of child care and the amount that families receive from Wisconsin Shares;
 - the difficulty that families on the borderline of poverty have affording care when they don't qualify for subsidies or other assistance;
 - the linkages between access and affordability;
 - the lack of support for unlicensed child care;
 - the difficulty that providers have in maintaining a high-quality business that parents can afford; and
 - parents being forced to make job decisions based on child care availability and subsidy qualifications.

During the 2020 Community Interviews:

- Interviewees described child care as too expensive. They noted that teachers, providers, and family caring for children should get paid more, but that parents can't afford to pay more.
- Primary caregivers were often unaware of resources available to help cover the price of child care. Rural white families who were lower middle class and above the income cut-off, didn't qualify for aid programs but couldn't afford care. Black families applying for subsidies described the requirements as a barrier.
- For primary caregivers receiving Wisconsin Shares, interviewees reported that participation meant greater oversight of their personal life and that the requirements for aid didn't make sense in the context of their everyday realities. Taking a raise or better paying job could mean the loss of subsidy, moving the price of care further out of reach.
- For some primary caregivers participating in Wisconsin Shares, they felt forced to choose between a provider that they trusted and who could provide linguistically— and culturally—relevant, enriching care, and a program with a YoungStar rating that could accept subsidies but without these offerings and which might undermine children's language, cultural, and identity development.

Substantial Declines in Wisconsin Shares Participation: Wisconsin Shares, the state's child care subsidy program, helps families at or below 185% of the federal poverty level access and afford child care. However, according to IRP's [report that analyzed trends in Wisconsin Shares from 2008-2018](#):

"We find that overall Wisconsin Shares receipt for children 5 years and under declined between 2008 and 2018. Although Shares receipt has declined across all child age groups, types of child care, and geographic regions, we find the largest percentage declines among children under 2 years old, those using certified care, and those residing in rural counties. Counties in the Northern region of the state and those with a high proportion of Native American residents experienced the largest percentage declines. The declines in Shares receipt are significant and large, and thus it is very unlikely that they could be explained by changes in poverty rates or family income, child care capacity, or demographic changes in the state."



Specifically, the IRP memo states:

- **Overall, the number of children receiving Wisconsin Shares declined by 35.4% between 2008 and 2018.** In 2008, 51,686 children age 5 and under received Wisconsin Shares. In 2018, only 33,393 children of the same ages received Wisconsin Shares.
- The receipt of Wisconsin Shares declined for both infants and toddlers and preschool-aged children from 2008 to 2018; yet, **infants and toddlers saw a significantly larger percentage decline in Wisconsin Shares receipt compared with preschoolers (55.8% decline vs. 24.0%).** Across all years, a greater number of preschoolers than infants and toddlers received a Wisconsin Shares subsidy (e.g., in 2018, 9,899 children under the age of 2 and 27,025 children age from 2-5 years).
- **The number of children receiving Wisconsin Shares decreased from 2008 to 2018 across all types of care—licensed group, licensed family and certified child care.** Declines of Wisconsin Shares receipt were steepest for children in certified care (-69.8%, from 6,888 to 1,558) and licensed family child care (-63.2%, from 11,817 to 4,349), but were also substantial for licensed group care (-23.8% from 38,239 to 29,124).
 - The number of children receiving Wisconsin Shares decreased across all three types of child care programs from 2008 to 2018, regardless of child age, but the decline was larger for infants and toddlers. **Among infants and toddlers under age 2 years, the receipt of Wisconsin Shares decreased for those in certified care (2,666 or -83.4%) more than for those in licensed family child care (3,933 or -72.3%) or in licensed group care (7,331 or -46.4%).**
 - Over the same time period, the number of preschoolers in group child care declined by a much smaller amount (2,980 or -11.2%) than the number of preschoolers in licensed family (4,410 or -57.7%) or in certified care (4,383 or -74%).
- Wisconsin Shares receipt has declined in counties with higher proportions of residents of color.
 - In counties with a higher proportion of black Hispanic, or Asian residents, there was a decline in receipt between 21% to 28%.
 - The largest decline in Wisconsin Shares receipt (-70%) was in counties with higher proportions of Native American residents. The total number of Native American children receiving Wisconsin Shares in these counties decreased by 70% from 723 in 2008 to 214 in 2018. However, tribes may also be directly providing child care assistance through their own Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) allocations or other resources.
- While both rural and urban areas of the state experienced declines in Wisconsin Shares receipt, the pattern over time and degree of change differed. In the state's most rural counties, the number of children receiving Wisconsin Shares declined 64.2% from 2008 to 2018. In the most urban parts of the state, Wisconsin Shares receipt increased in 2009, plateaued and then began its decline from 2012 through 2018, for a total decline of 28.4%. In Milwaukee County, the decline of 20.9% was more modest.



WORKFORCE

As outlined in the 2020 [Statewide Needs Assessment Summary](#):

- The average hourly wage for a Wisconsin Child Care worker is \$10.33.
- The average annual income of Wisconsin Child Care workers was \$2,000 less than the national average.
- A Wisconsin provider with an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education earns less than other professions with a similar degree.
- Staff at child care programs with 50% or more children receiving Wisconsin Shares had lower wages, were less likely to have a degree, and had a higher turnover rate.
- The Southeastern Region has more racially/ethnically diverse child care professionals compared to the rest of the state. In Milwaukee, 41% of child care professionals identify as black and 11% identify as Hispanic.

Recruiting and Retaining ECE Workforce: A key challenge for child care programs is recruiting and retaining well-qualified staff. Access of the child care workforce to adequate compensation and benefits is a significant contributor to this challenge. According to DCF, staff costs comprise roughly 80% of providers' expenses. Due to providers' low-profit margins, the ECE workforce earns on average between \$10.33 per hour with few benefits. These low wages have led to an annual turnover rate of 40% in the workforce, making it difficult for child care providers to sustain high-quality programs. (Source: DCF)

There is also a mismatch between the cost of education, training, and credentials needed to enter the early childhood workforce, and the wages and benefits they receive. Costs and challenges associated with becoming a licensed/regulated child care provider, or a high-quality child care provider, may differ across race and other underserved demographics in the state. Individuals who may have a transformative impact on children and families may simply be priced out of the field. After the public health emergency, it will be critical to improve recruitment, retention, and support of a high-quality and effective ECE workforce.

The public health emergency has highlighted the teacher shortage in public schools as well. The higher wages and increased benefits of public school professionals, additionally leads to greater inequities across the ECE workforce.

In addition, it is difficult for staff and providers to access affordable training and credit-based opportunities. Without an available substitute pool, the workforce does not have the ability to leave work and attend training/credit-based course work. Without increased compensation, there is not enough incentive for the workforce to seek higher learning. In addition to training opportunities, staff and providers also need ongoing professional support including infant mental health consultation and coaching.



During the 2020 Listening Sessions:

- Participants discussed issues including low wages, few benefits, insufficient training, and a lack of community respect for ECE, and staff retention.
- Participants in the Spanish-language session discussed the lack of training available in Spanish.
- Tribal participants discussed cultural responsiveness, specifically the need for more inclusive care for indigenous children, including incorporating more community knowledge (such as Tribal Elders story telling) into child care settings.

During the 2020 Community Interviews:

- Providers discussed issues including wages, benefits, training, staff retention and culture. Family child care providers shared that they could not afford to take time off and do not have access to substitute providers.
- Providers of color noted inequities in salary with black and Hmong staff being paid less than their white counterparts.
- Some Black child care providers experience racial discrimination, or antiblack racism, when interacting with supervisors, technical assistance providers, or regulatory agency staff. Black child care providers face high barriers to workforce participation, while contributing diverse assets that are undervalued or unrecognized.
- Parents and providers noted the lack of racial/ethnic and gender diversity across the ECE system. Hmong, Black, and Latinx interviewees expressed the need for greater cultural humility or awareness among white child care staff/administrators as well as the need for fundamental respect for cultural differences, being self-aware and integrating cultures into child care systems.

What initiatives does Wisconsin currently have underway to ensure that high-quality care is available to vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas in the state?

To ensure high-quality care is available to vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas, Wisconsin utilizes the Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network (WEESN) through the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA). “WEESN brings together family and group child care programs to pool resources and leverage economies of scale.” (Source: [Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network](#)) In addition to WEESN, targeted training and technical assistance (TTA) for providers is utilized in rural areas of the state as well as with tribal providers.

Despite leveraging WEESN and targeted TTA, high-quality ECE opportunities still remain out of reach for many vulnerable, underserved, and rural families in Wisconsin due to the high cost of regulated care. This means that the families who could benefit most are often those who are least able to access high-quality child care.

As a result, child care affordability is an important issue for many Wisconsin families, particularly lower wage earners, many of whom are also people of color and many of whom may already receive Wisconsin



Shares. One way to address this disparity would be to boost funding for Wisconsin Shares in order to increase payments for families who choose programs with a higher quality rating. In addition, increasing payments to high-quality programs and providers may lead providers to invest in developmentally appropriate curriculum, environments, and professional development. It may also allow providers to employ well-trained staff, helping to meet higher quality rating standards under YoungStar. When providers receive critical financial support, they can stabilize their prices and stay in business, which in turn increases access for vulnerable, underserved, or rural families. This is especially true for the infant-toddler caregiving population, where care is the most expensive to provide and where teachers earn the lowest wage and are disproportionately women of color.

DCF is working to proactively identify high-priority communities that have significant concentrations of poverty and unemployment and lack of access to high-quality programs. For example, as part of the [53206 Early Care and Education Initiative](#), the 53206-zip code in Milwaukee County has been identified as high-need and is receiving additional supports and services:

- DCF contracts with local [Child Care Resource and Referral](#) (CCR&R) agencies and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to provide professional development and financial support through a workforce pilot focused on increasing the educational level of ECE professionals working in the 53206-zip code.
- DCF funded the creation of Early Learning Kits that provide quality materials to programs in the area.
- The local CCR&R provides targeted technical assistance to increase the quality of infant and toddler child care and to encourage active participation in YoungStar quality improvement services.
- DCF increased the financial support for families living in the 53206-zip code who utilize Wisconsin Shares and have children zero to three years of age.

(Source: DCF; Wisconsin [2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan](#))

How does Wisconsin inform parents about what constitutes a high-quality child care center and how different centers match up in terms of quality?

As a child's first teachers and most invested stakeholders, parents and families must not only have a variety of high-quality options for ECE, but also must be empowered with the knowledge about early childhood development to inform their choices

One way Wisconsin informs and educates parents about high-quality child care centers is through the state's [Child Care Finder \(CCF\)](#) site. This DCF website:

- provides families with information about the YoungStar program and regulated child care;
- allows families to search for high-quality programs near them; and
- gives families the opportunity to sort their results based on type of care needed and quality rating.

In addition to star ratings, DCF continues to add new features on our public CCF website to showcase unique services that child care programs offer, and to help families find the care they need. Each feature has a unique icon or symbol along with a message describing the services that are provided. Currently, six service icons



have been added to CCF: programs that provide instruction in a language(s) other than English; programs that offer Infant Care; programs that offer Night Time Child Care; programs that offer Weekend Care; programs that offer 4K programming; and programs that offer Head Start programming. In the near future, CCF will highlight program's receipt of certain high-quality practices within YoungStar. Programs will be recognized on the CCF site when they have mastered one or more of the following high-quality practices: curriculum alignment with Wisconsin's Early Learning Standards; Portfolio use with individual children and families; tracking child outcomes; developmental screening practices; and completion of individual child assessments.

In the near future, programs will have the ability to be assessed on, and receive recognition for, specialized program knowledge and quality program implementation in the areas of: multilingual programming, inclusion for children with disabilities, and/or social-emotional programming. For these areas, Wisconsin is creating "badges" that can be earned by child care programs that demonstrate proficiency and an educational background related to whatever badge they wish to earn. Currently, the Inclusion Badge and a Social-Emotional Excellence Badge are under development and will be available by 2022–23. Each badge will include both educational and observational components that must be met in order by a program before it can be awarded.

In addition, Wisconsin used PDG funds to partner with a communications and marketing firm to develop a comprehensive and integrated communication plan that is accessible to all families and focused on the importance of high-quality ECE programs that meet the specific needs of families.

[Child Care Resource and Referral](#) (CCR&R) agencies as well as [Family Resource Centers](#) (FRC) also serve as important resources for parents in helping them locate high-quality, licensed child care in the state. Local CCR&R agencies help parents find and select child care, identify local child care needs and resources, and provide public information about high-quality, regulated child care programs. They also refer families to other community supports, provide trainings to providers, identify, and support unregulated programs, and answer questions around ECE from families and child care providers. Wisconsin has eight service delivery regions with nine CCR&R agencies providing services statewide. Individual agency funding levels are based on the number of counties served as well as the population within each region. Additionally, CCR&R contracts require that the information provided to parents is done so in a culturally and linguistically significant manner. FRCs provide supports that emphasize and build on family strengths. They offer a range of services (e.g., nutrition and housing supports, health and mental services, ECE) to meet the individual needs of each family and community. Depending upon their location, FRC services are inclusive and responsive to communities with a significant Tribal presence or whose primary language is not English.

While they are critical touchpoints for parents to learn more about and connect with high-quality child care programs, CCR&Rs and FRCs are not located in all 72 counties in Wisconsin. Therefore, not all families have access to the services they provide.



What are the areas of biggest need and opportunity in improving the quality and availability of care, particularly for vulnerable or underserved children?

Several opportunities exist to improve the quality and availability of care for children who are vulnerable, underserved, or living in rural communities in Wisconsin.

Strengthening, Supporting, and Expanding the ECE Workforce: According to [Wisconsin's Child Care Workforce](#) survey by WECA, the median starting wage of a regulated child care professional was \$10.00 per hour compared to \$18.75 per hour in the state workforce who hold an associate's degree. Building and growing a highly qualified, fairly compensated ECE workforce is critical to Wisconsin's efforts.

Professional Development: Improving access to quality training content in on-line module format (combined with onsite mentoring and coaching support) for new workforce members to learn and implement developmentally appropriate practices, understand and guide child development, scaffold learning opportunities, expand children's language, and develop positive and interactions with children and families. In addition, ensuring that training and technical assistance professionals who support ECE professionals have training in implicit bias and best practices in social-emotional development, inclusive care, and multilingual programming.

Start-Up Grants: In addition to cultivating ECE workforce development, training, and support, providing access to grants to support start up, building structure, and expansion of child care programming in rural Wisconsin would help to address current gaps pertaining to the availability of care. Some current regulated programs have an interest in expansion but require additional investment from alternate sources to increase the size and capacity of enrollment in programs. Potential funding sources include PDG, federal relief, state GPR, and private investment.

2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary SWOT Analysis: As part of the initial needs assessment work performed in 2020, a SWOT analysis was done using quantitative and qualitative data that considered opportunities to achieve Wisconsin's ECE vision. Opportunities identified are outlined in Table 23 below:



TABLE 23: 2020 Statewide Needs Assessment Summary SWOT Analysis: Opportunities

Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demand for child care and other family supporting services is high so there is potential for opening new programs;• Desire for collaboration and partnership with families and communities;• Transitioning family/friend/neighbor care to regulated system; and• Opportunities to expand the 4K Community Approach.
Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New sources of funding and flexibility around fund use; and• Business community is more aware of child care issues and its impact on employees, may be willing to offer support.
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• YoungStar workforce available to connect and support providers interested in participating; and• Collaboration with school districts, business community, health care, and other ECE programs and partners.
Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional development, mentorship, coaching, and wellness opportunities available;• Partnerships and relief funding to increase wages and financial support;• Building capacity to address issues related to poverty and/or trauma; and• Communications campaign to increase recognition and value of field.

Looking Ahead to the 2022 Comprehensive Needs Assessment

As previously noted, the work Wisconsin completed in 2020 reflects a distinct and intentional focus on child care as an urgent statewide priority. While other ECE programs were engaged and involved in the work, more must be done to examine how all ECE programs and services work together to support the healthy development and wellbeing of young children, and where gaps exist. Going forward, Wisconsin will explicitly focus on analyzing the quality and availability of all ECE programs and services—including 4K, Head Start, and early intervening services—as well as range of services available to support families with young children. A complete and more holistic picture of all ECE programs and services will support Wisconsin’s efforts to target effective practices, policies, and initiatives.



V. GAPS IN DATA OR RESEARCH TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION

While information about the service use of children and families in Wisconsin's ECE is described extensively in other sections, there are several gaps in data and research that limit understanding of families' access to quality, affordable Wisconsin ECE services.

What are some of the most important gaps in data or research about the programs and supports available to families?

Data gaps previously noted include:

- **Head Start:** Head Start data is not yet collected at the state level and is not part of the ECIDS, limiting the state's ability to analyze this population of children and their participation in other state programs and services. Wisconsin is actively working to address data limitations with respect to Head Start, using PDG funds to pilot migration of Head Start data into DCF's LIFT system.
- **Race/Ethnicity Data in LIFT:** Data on race and ethnicity in programs across DCF's LIFT system, including Wisconsin Shares, is incomplete or unavailable for many children and families receiving services from DCF. As a result, researchers have had to examine trends in racial composition of counties of residence as a proxy for this information.
- **Persistent IDs:** Currently, each agency participating in ECIDS identifies program participants in a distinct way. ECIDS combines these data, creating a unique ID for the individual during the de-identification process that is maintained in the system. However, for each subsequent research request, a separate research ID is assigned to each client/student included in the request, making it unusable across multiple research requests. Wisconsin is using PDG funds to create a solution that will maintain these unique IDs across requests to track children and families over time and across ECIDS requests.
- **Measuring Child Care Capacity:** Wisconsin's regulatory systems do not currently capture the child care capacity of regulated programs by age group. Therefore, the state can't measure the actual total space available or enrollment by age group. Improvements to capturing capacity by age group will allow Wisconsin to more accurately identify areas of need for children seeking child care services.
- **Quality Definition/Measurement:** There is no single measure of "quality" across ECE. Wisconsin has a quality measure for child care through YoungStar, its QRIS. Head Start has its own performance standards, and 4K programs are accountable to local school districts. This also limits our research on access to quality ECE.
- **Availability/Access Definitions:** Similarly, current definitions of availability and access may not fully incorporate all ECE programs and options that families may access (e.g., 4K, Early Head Start and Head Start).
- **Characteristics of 4K (and 3K) Programs:** While enrollment data is available, information about the characteristics of 4K programs (e.g., which programs are full day, half day, certain days of the week, etc.) or school district-based 3K programs are not consistently reported in an uniform way to the state.
- **Measuring Kindergarten Readiness:** Efforts and data to evaluate school readiness and/or transitions from ECE into the early grades is locally driven. As a state with a strong tradition of local control,



Wisconsin does not have a universal kindergarten screener. State-required standardized assessments begin in 3rd grade (reading) and 4th grade (reading, math, social studies, science). State law requires an annual assessment for reading readiness for each pupil in grades 4K–2. However, while Wisconsin statutes required school districts to administer a reading readiness assessment in the early grades from 2013-2016, state law was changed for the 2016-17 school year to provide school districts discretion over which screener to administer. (Source: DPI)

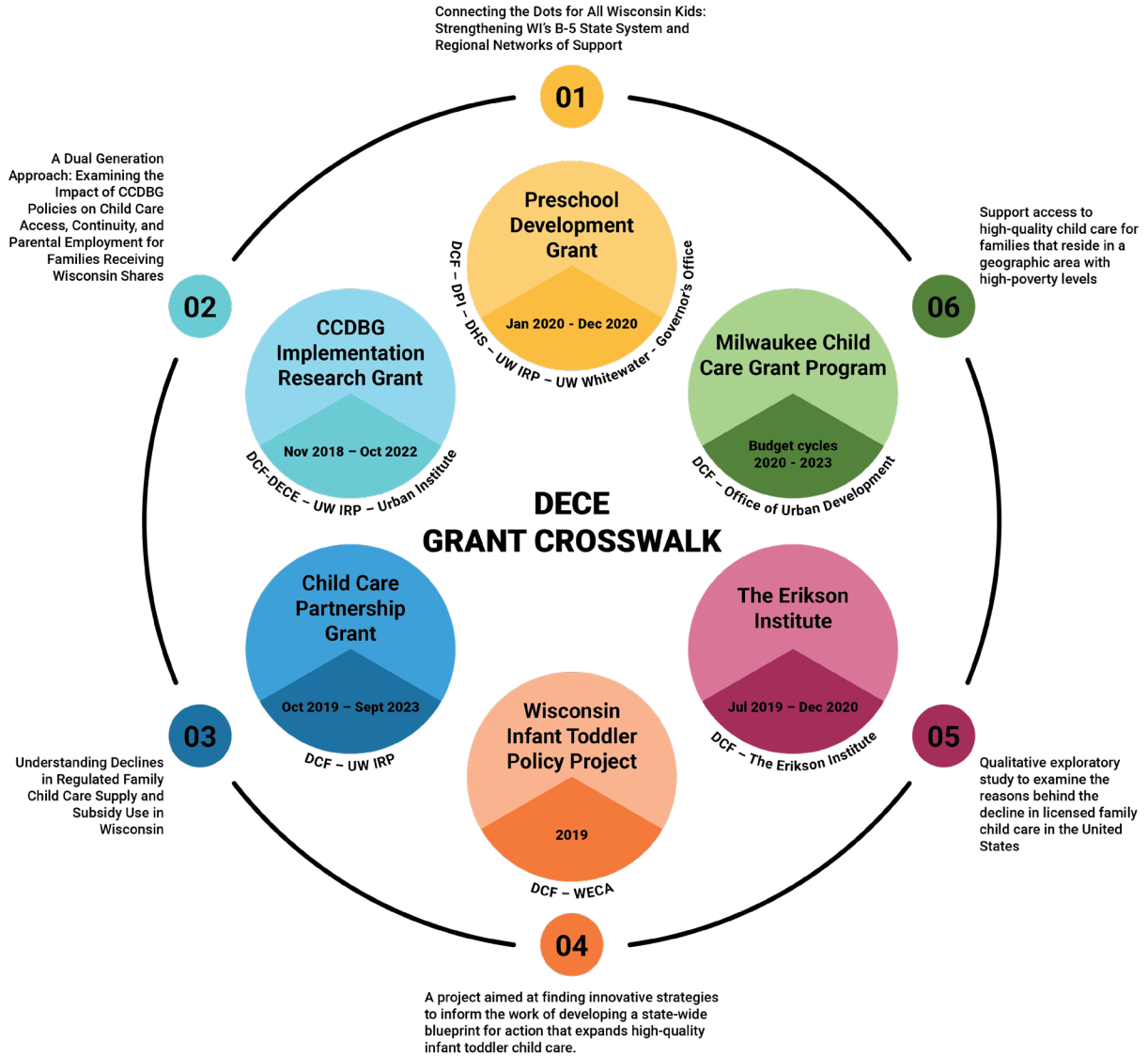
What initiatives are currently underway to address these gaps?

There are currently several initiatives underway to address both qualitative and quantitative data and research gaps, as illustrated in Figure P below. In addition to data and research efforts related to PDG and PDG-R described elsewhere, data/research efforts that will contribute to the 2022 Needs Assessment effort include:

- CCDBG Implementation Research Grant: Together with IRP, DCF will utilize this ACF-funded effort to assess the impact of Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) policies in Wisconsin on **child care access, continuity, and parental employment for families receiving Wisconsin Shares subsidy payments**;
- YoungStar evaluation efforts with several groups.
- Child Care Partnership Grant with UW-Madison IRP: this grant will be used to **understand declines in regulated child care supply and subsidy use**, as well as access to the full range of ECE programs within each region in Wisconsin;
- Wisconsin Infant Toddler Policy Project: Funded by the Pritzker Foundation, this collaborative effort with WECA and multiple other ECE partners is helping Wisconsin establish a common policy agenda to **increase infant/toddler access to high-quality, affordable ECE**;
- DCF is partnering with the Erickson Institute to examine **family care engagement and retention**, given substantial declines in regulated family care across the state.
- As noted elsewhere, the 53206 Early Care and Education Initiative aims to understand and increase access to affordable, quality child care throughout the 53206 zip code in Milwaukee (one of the most economically disadvantaged areas of the state with high concentrations of poverty).



FIGURE P: DCF Division of Early Care and Education (DECE) Grant Crosswalk





VI. QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF B-5 ECSS PROGRAMS/SUPPORTS

Wisconsin has an extensive array of state, regional, and local systems of support for families served by the B-5 ECSS system, described below and throughout the document.

What programs or supports do you have available that help connect children to appropriate, high-quality care and education?

Wisconsin has a multitude of supports and services to connect young children and families to ECE opportunities and services. A few examples are included below:

Child Care Finder: As described previously, DCF's Child Care Finder is a robust system that connects families to child care programs based on location and care setting characteristics that meet their individual needs and preferences. The Child Care Finder website:

- Includes child care regulation and YoungStar quality rating information;
- Is mobile-friendly and includes up-to-date information on YoungStar participation and regulatory monitoring results;
- Provides multiple ways of searching for programs, including by name, location (within desired number of miles to an address), type of child care, and YoungStar rating.

Several sections of the website were designed through a partnership between DCF and a marketing firm that specializes in working with families in low-income areas. DCF is also developing a Tribal Child Care resource page to connect families to individual tribal websites that outlines resources and the tribe's CCDF Plan.

(Source: [2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan](#), DCF)

Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) and Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are another resource available to Wisconsin families to connect them to local, licensed child care, as well as other community services. The Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA) is the state's membership organization for CCR&Rs and FRCs that [maintains a list of member agencies statewide](#).

Direct Parent Outreach: DCF has a major role in supporting families so that they better understand the importance of high-quality early education practices and the impact that early experiences can have on brain development, social-emotional development, and future success in school and life. In 2020 through PDG, DCF launched a targeted marketing campaign to increase awareness of these issues among families, especially families experiencing homelessness, teen parents, urban populations, migrant and seasonal families, tribal communities, and families with children with special needs. Some highlights from this campaign include:

- The creation of three videos to educate families on YoungStar and early brain development including "What is YoungStar," "Start with Experiences," and "Toxic Stress". All videos are available on the parent section of the [YoungStar website](#).
- The development of resource materials for families on topics such as developmental milestones, early literacy, family engagement, and early brain development. These resources are available on the [YoungStar website](#).



- The completion of a paid advertising campaign, geared towards families, including messages about high-quality child care through such media as Google AdWords, YouTube, Twitter, print advertisements, and radio.
- Individualized parent outreach called “Parent Huddles” in which parents were invited by members of their community to learn more about quality child care. These huddles and “Front Porch Chats” were conducted by grassroots outreach organizations contracted with DCF.
- DCF has also developed a web section devoted entirely to [Early Childhood Inclusion](#). The site includes resources for families with concerns about their child’s development, services available for children with special needs and disabilities, and information regarding selecting an early education setting for a child with special needs.
- DCF previously contracted with SFTA to provide Parent Cafés as a method of disseminating child care information as a family-friendly strategy. Some local agencies have continued to host Parent Cafés in order to put families in direct contact with local community supports, such as family resource centers, churches, and community centers which assist in disseminating information about the availability of high-quality child care and local family supports. (Source: [2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan](#), DCF)

How is Wisconsin reaching vulnerable or underserved children and families?

In addition to the resources above, Wisconsin also has multiple avenues to reach vulnerable or underserved families, including:

Multilingual children and families: DCF works extensively to identify families potentially eligible for services through coordination with local county/tribal human services agencies, Family Resource Centers (FRCs), CCR&R agencies, migrant worker service providers and through local TANF agencies. This outreach will be expanded to include homeless service programs, domestic abuse service programs, and housing programs. Spanish and Hmong are the predominant languages in addition to English. DCF has the ability to provide interpretation, translations, training, and technical assistance in other languages. The Child Care Finder website provides families who speak Spanish and Hmong contact information for individual staff members that can assist and support the family member in their native language. (Source: [2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan](#), DCF)

Children/families with disabilities: To promote access to person(s) with disabilities, the YoungStar website was made accessible for people using screen readers by using meta and alt tags or descriptions. These tags can play a crucial role in how people interpret a webpage and help to give written information for images found on pages. The Wisconsin Shares subsidy program provides added financial support to families seeking high-quality child care for children with a disability. A family that receives Wisconsin Shares may be eligible to receive a higher subsidy amount to assist the child care provider with any additional costs (e.g., specialized training, individualized services, etc.) to care for children with disabilities who may require a higher level of care within the child care setting.

DCF also has requirements embedded in contracts with CCR&R agencies and within the YoungStar service delivery contract that require providing information, resources, training, and professional development on



developmental screenings and how to access and make referrals for screening. CCR&R agencies provide information on developmental screening and the [Wisconsin Child Find](#) system to parents and providers. This includes making referrals and requests for screening through Wisconsin's [Well Badger Resource Center](#) as well as providing information on Birth to 3 and special education services through Local Education Agencies (LEAs). CCR&Rs also offer training and assistance on implementing the Ages and Stages Questionnaires, Developmental Milestones checklist, and other screening tools. Finally, in Wisconsin some CCR&R agencies serve as the direct service provider of Wisconsin's Birth to 3 programming. (Source: [2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan](#), DCF)

Children and families eligible for Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program: Tribal and county agencies that administer the Wisconsin Shares program have brochures and fact sheets readily available to parents and the general public to support increased understanding of Wisconsin Shares Eligibility Guidelines and the importance of choosing high-quality child care. Parents, providers and the general public are able to receive written information on the Wisconsin Shares program through CCR&R agencies and FRCs as well as at the Wisconsin Shares website. Information about available child care can be accessed at CCR&R agencies and FRCs as well as the YoungStar website. DCF utilizes multiple listservs and a bi-weekly child care listserv to inform providers about the child care subsidy program and other topics. Information is available in Spanish and Hmong to ensure materials are available for families whose first language is not English. Information about other resources available for parents including 4-year-old kindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start can be found on the [YoungStar FAQs page](#). DCF also utilizes multiple social media platforms to disseminate Wisconsin Shares information to parents, the general public, and providers. Finally, DCF is exploring permanent online and virtual options to ensure all families have access to this critical information during situations when access to Human Services agencies is prohibited due to emergency situations. (Source: [2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan](#), DCF)

What specific initiatives are in place to address the needs of parents/families that meet their cultural and/or linguistic needs?

In May 2020, DCF partnered with WIDA Early Years in an effort to increase the number of ECE professionals who have training and education on working with multilingual learners. DCF funds a six-part, computer-based training series around best practices for supporting multilingual learners in early education. Through our partnership with WIDA Early Years, all providers, consultants, trainers, and coaches across the state have free access to the WIDA Early Years eLearning resources which include the self-paced online modules and other resources. Training modules included the following topics: Dual Language Learners and Their Families, Dual Language Learners with Disabilities, E-ELD Standards Framework, Promising Practices, Scaffolding Language Learning, and Are we ready? What K-12 Educators Can Do to Support Young Multilingual Children. In addition WIDA provided technical assistance in examining the YoungStar's Group Child Care 2020/2021 Evaluation Criteria through an equity lens. The [WIDA Early Years Findings and Recommendations Report](#) for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families details key findings and recommendations to strengthen how YoungStar promotes equity and support for multilingual children and their families.



In the upcoming fiscal year, DCF is implementing or continuing several additional initiatives to advance equity in the early education field. In consultation with nationally recognized training and technical assistance (TTA) providers focused on equity and inclusion, DCF is establishing an Equity Advisory Council (EAC) in order to engage beneficiary voices across the state. DCF will collaborate with communities that lack opportunity structures for children and families. The EAC will act as a feedback loop to ensure authentic engagement with communities is at the forefront of decision making. Additional initiatives may include:

- Collaborate with a national organization to review QRIS TTA system through an equity lens
- Seek expansion of an existing infant-toddler mental health consultation service to reduce suspension and expulsion
- Contract with WIDA to provide a 4-part Professional Learning Cohort training series around the WIDA Early Years Essential Actions, which are best practices for working with multilingual children and families
- Continue to create a foundational social-emotional development training tailored to early educators to be offered for free
- Continue to create an anti-bias training tailored to early educators to be offered for free
- In partnership with WI-AIMH, DPI, and national experts, complete an equity inventory of key essential structures for Pyramid Model in Wisconsin
- Subcontract with the authors of the nationally renowned Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning and Development (CHILD) assessment tool to provide reliability training and coaching on the tool for Wisconsin's TTA providers

What programs or supports do you have to help ensure the ECE settings are helping vulnerable or underserved children access needed support services (e.g., health care, food assistance, housing assistance, economic assistance)?

According to information provided in Wisconsin's 2022-24 CCDF Draft Plan, the following supports are available to help children and families access needed services:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program: Local human services agency staff and economic support workers provide information on TANF to families receiving CCDF who may also qualify for assistance through TANF. The Ready4K text messaging program has been contracted by the DCF to provide free text messaging information and curriculum to subscribed parents statewide. Information about this program has been provided via text message, newsletters, website, and social media. Additionally, DCF partners with tribal agencies to ensure access to resources, programs, and services available through each individual tribe.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs: The local agency worker shares information with parents on available Head Start programming. Additionally, the state Head Start Collaboration Office disseminates information to Head Start and Early Head Start programs related to Wisconsin Shares. The Head Start



Collaboration Office has regular communication with the CSBG grant manager and the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): DCF contracts with CCR&R agencies for a variety of services in the area of child care. Many of these organizations are co-located with the FRC. Information and resources are shared between the offices and, if a family needed the services of LIHEAP, they would be directed to the FRC in the area, the tribe, county or other agency that runs the program in the area, or 211.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): The SNAP program and Wisconsin Shares use the same eligibility workers in the local county or tribal agency. The Ready4K text messaging program has been contracted by DCF to provide free text messaging information and curriculum to subscribed parents statewide. Information about this program has been provided via text message.

Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) program: DCF contracts with CCR&R agencies for a variety of services. Information and resources are shared between the offices. If a family needed the services of WIC, they would be referred to the organization that runs the program in the county.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): DCF's Child Care Finder website provides information to parents regarding child care providers that are recognized for providing healthy meals and snacks. DCF shares CACFP participation information with all regulated child care programs and all applicants working towards becoming regulated.

Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP): Wisconsin Shares uses the same eligibility workers as the Medicaid and CHIP programs. Additionally, information regarding other health programs provided by Wisconsin's DHS are available at local human services agencies. These agencies are also contracted by DCF to administer the child care subsidy program. Information is available and can be provided to CCDF families at these agencies. The Ready4K text messaging program has been contracted by DCF to provide free text messaging information and curriculum to subscribed parents statewide. Information about this program has been provided via text message.

Programs carried out under IDEA Part B, Section 619 and Part C: DCF contracts with CCR&R agencies for a variety of services in the area of child care. Many of these organizations are co-located with FRCs. Information and resources are shared between the offices and, if a family identifies a need for services for a child with special needs, the referral will be made to appropriate services in the community (Birth to 3, the public school, etc.).

Challenges and Opportunities

Wisconsin has many programs and supports available to families with young children. However, it can do more to connect what is often a patchwork of state, regional, and local service delivery to families' needs. For example:

Early Intervention: COVID-19 has resulted in Wisconsin seeing a sharp drop in the number of children referred and connected to the Birth to Three (B3P) Part C Program. Similarly, children are less connected to early



childhood special education (ECSE). Even pre-COVID-19, the number of children connected to ECSE typically increased significantly when children turned four years old, likely as a result of Wisconsin's statewide 4K program and referrals made through it. Ensuring that families are supported in understanding their child's development and know who to talk to when they have concerns is a critical undertaking. Wisconsin's Child Find efforts for B3P and ECSE are done at the local level with the state providing resources, technical assistance, and oversight to IDEA Part C and B. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

When Wisconsin saw a significant drop in referrals during 2020, Wisconsin increased its communications support by providing materials for more consistent messaging statewide, particularly to ensure families understand that B3P and ECSE services remain "open" during COVID-19. These communications were available in English, Spanish, and Hmong, distributed through DHS's and DPI's networks, and shared broadly by Wisconsin-AAP and the Wisconsin Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) network (including partners from Native Nations located in Wisconsin, as well as child welfare-connected and McKinney-Vento partners).

Wisconsin plans to continue to share these messages widely by planning a social media strategy as well as distributing these messages through DCF's child care networks during PDG-R. This will ensure that families and providers are aware of IDEA services available to them and are connected to B3P and ECSE. Wisconsin plans to use these materials as a launching point for an ongoing statewide messaging campaign, which will be connected to and aligned with the PDG-R funded statewide multimedia communications efforts. Finally, it is crucial to support positive relationships between families and the ECE workforce so that the workforce has the skills to engage in potentially difficult conversations about child development. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Infant-Mental Health: Cultivating a system of infant-mental health consultants across the state that are available to all providers is also a critical undertaking. DCF collaborates with the Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WI-AIMH) and other stakeholders to develop and pilot the use of infant and early childhood mental health consultants within early care and education programs. A pilot program is being implemented in two areas within the state, one rural and one urban, to test the efficacy and need for mental health consultation within ECE programs. DCF is also collaborating with the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health Collective Impact workgroup to design a package that would support the creation of an infant and early childhood mental health consultation workforce. The package addresses the scaling up of the current pilot programs to meet the needs of the entire state.

Family Navigators: COVID-19 has shined a spotlight on the need to strengthen Wisconsin's safety net for families living in poverty, families newly experiencing poverty as a result of the pandemic, and communities of color (who have been disproportionately affected). During its initial PDG efforts, Wisconsin piloted ECE Family Navigators in two culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The role of these Navigators is to provide direct assistance to families with underserved or vulnerable children under the age of 6. Its goals are to solve problems and access services across ECE, health, social services, and K-12 systems, as well as local community-based services tailored to meet family needs. Building off a current pilot in Dane County funded by Schmidt Futures, initial PDG funds leveraged the work from the Dane County pilot, funded initial startup costs



in two additional counties/regions, and built the infrastructure between families, ECE programs, state and county public assistance programs, LEAs, etc. In 2021 and beyond, Wisconsin is funding CANPB to support FRCs (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Wisconsin's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB) provides state-level infrastructure and oversight for FRCs. Family or community navigators at FRC, provide direct assistance to help families problem solve, navigate, and access services. Family navigators are current or former beneficiaries of ECE and/or other family supporting systems. With PDG-R, Wisconsin will fund CANPB to support FRCs, with at least 80% of funds going directly to local FRCs to expand direct services to families and allow FRCs to hire family navigators where needed. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Wisconsin's PDG Strategic Plan: Wisconsin's 2021-23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan builds on existing state, regional, local, and Tribal ECE systems to promote greater quality and availability of programs and services across the B-5 ECSS. Examples of strategies promoting innovative collaboration across the B-5 ECSS within Wisconsin's current strategic plan include:

- Enhance access to programming for infant/early childhood mental health consultation available to professionals across all infant/young child and family serving disciplines including child care, home visiting, child welfare, Early Head Start, Birth to 3 Program early intervention, and pediatricians.
- Simplify the subsidy application process across various family support programs like FoodShare and BadgerCare.
- Provide guaranteed, short-term subsidy (presumptive eligibility) for when parents are awaiting approval for Wisconsin Shares eligibility.
- Explore two-generation approaches and partnerships to interrupt poverty and increase resources for families (e.g., job training, education, financial counseling, housing programs) which improve the affordability of ECE programs.
- Explore creative policies to address community challenges (e.g., lack of transportation, vacant facilities) to increase resources for families and decrease program operating costs.
- Increase ECE capacity to support children with special needs and train staff on referral process to available programs/services, including IDEA Part C and Part B.

(Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Looking Ahead to the 2022 Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Beyond

This domain, and the key questions it raises, will be a top focus for the 2022 Needs Assessment efforts. Wisconsin will engage in another round of state, regional, and local stakeholder engagement and outreach beginning in 2021 and throughout 2022 to update the both its needs assessment and strategic plan to incorporate B-5 ECSS components that need further development. They include the Birth to 3 Program (B3P), WI's IDEA Part C, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), WI's IDEA Part B, and other family support services (including health, mental health, and nutrition).



As outlined elsewhere in this application, parent and family engagement will be a top priority area in these efforts to help the state identify what is working well, what could work better, and to identify what more we need to know about these programs and the populations to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

Further, in its PDG-R application, Wisconsin indicated interest in leveraging the LCEY and other stakeholders to identify ways to simplify the processes for families to access a variety of public benefits, including ECE and family-supporting programs. While the state streamlined the application form for SNAP, Medicaid, Family Planning, and Wisconsin Shares, the process continues to be challenging, and these programs are underutilized. As part of its PDG-R work, Wisconsin plans to engage a variety of stakeholders, including those connected to Well Badger (a health information and referral program operated by the WI Women's Health Foundation), United Way's 2-1-1, CCR&Rs, FRCs, Community Action Agencies, and other organizations and referral systems, as well as diverse families who are beneficiaries of these programs. The goal is to foster a streamlined application, eligibility, and enrollment process for a variety of ECE and family supporting programs. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))



VII. MEASURABLE INDICATORS OF PROGRESS ALIGNED TO WISCONSIN'S VISION/OUTCOMES

What measurable indicators currently exist that can be used to track progress? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these indicators?

For purposes of the 2020 [Needs Assessment Summary](#), Wisconsin focused on background indicators across health, employment, poverty, and education, which help bring to light underlying issues affecting communities. While these indicators are explored in greater detail in the 2020 Needs Assessment Summary report and in Wisconsin's [PDG Sandbox](#), a sampling of the indicators is included in Table 4 above in Executive Summary section.

Wisconsin's 2021-23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan

[Wisconsin's 2021-23 PDG Strategic Plan](#) identifies objectives, progress measures, and strategies across access, affordability, quality, and workforce. It also identifies multiple cross-cutting global objectives. Beginning with a needed focus on child care, the strategic plan aims to help Wisconsin:

- achieve a more cohesive, comprehensive ECSS that improves service delivery across all ECE settings and services;
- build on Wisconsin's strong history of coordination and collaboration across ECE programs;
- leverage new partnerships and allies;
- improve transitions for children; and
- increase the overall participation in high-quality ECE.

A summary of the 2021-23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan is outlined in Table 24 below:



TABLE 24: 2021-23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan Summary

Initial Strategic Plan Goals:	Initial Strategic Plan Objectives
<p>Goal 1: The Wisconsin ECE WORKFORCE will be diverse, fairly compensated, and supported.</p>	<p>Increase the size and diversity (i.e., by race, ethnicity, language, and gender) of the ECE workforce.</p> <p>Maintain the current ECE workforce and increase their job satisfaction.</p> <p>Increase collaboration across the B-5 ECSS and with community members to address workforce issues.</p>
<p>Goal 2: Wisconsin children and families, including vulnerable or underserved and rural populations, will have equitable ACCESS to ECE programs that meet their needs.</p>	<p>Build awareness of the amount and type of B-5 local ECE that is available and/or needed in each region (i.e., for certain age groups, populations, and/or non-standard hours of service).</p> <p>Increase the number of children and families served by B-5 ECE programs by opening new programs and/or expanding existing programs.</p> <p>Prioritize programs meeting targeted needs, particularly in rural areas.</p> <p>Increase collaboration across the B-5 ECSS and with community members to address needs for expansion of ECE programs.</p>
<p>Goal 3: ECE and related services will be AFFORDABLE for Wisconsin families, including vulnerable or underserved and rural populations.</p>	<p>Reduce the percentage of families' income spent on ECE.</p> <p>Decrease the cost of operating ECE programs without reducing quality through innovative cost sharing models and economies of scale.</p> <p>Increase collaboration across the B-5 ECSS and with community members to increase the affordability of ECE programs.</p>
<p>Goal 4: Wisconsin ECE will be high-QUALITY and responsive to all families' needs.</p>	<p>Increase participation among current and future ECE professionals in a range of enhanced professional learning opportunities.</p> <p>Increase child care programs' participation in the YoungStar (YS) quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).</p> <p>Increase movement of YS-participating programs from 2 Star ratings to 3 Stars or higher in the QRIS.</p> <p>Increase collaboration across the B-5 ECSS to foster parent, provider, and community engagement in quality improvement efforts.</p> <p>Expand research-based programs that ensure parents/guardians have the supports that they need to promote optimal health and development for their children.</p> <p>Reduce preschool suspension and expulsion rates, particularly among black boys.</p>



In addition, the strategic plan identifies global tactics and best practices, including:

- Under the direction of LCEY and ECAC in collaboration with WITPP, form a statewide Equity Advisory Council to develop a shared framework/process to be used to ensure a dedicated focus on equity during policy development, review, and revision.
- Develop and promote innovative, collaborative ECE business models.
- Engage business leader ambassadors in promoting retention and expansion of ECE in their region, with example business models provided in the Strategic Plan Appendix.
- Expand availability and promote participation in shared services networks.
- Promote family engagement practices, starting with parent involvement in the creation of a shared vision, updating of connected resources, policies and requirements, and measures to ensure equitable access by all providers and families.
- Increase the availability of translated materials into all relevant languages to support equitable access to information among children, parents, families, and the workforce.
- Expand ECE/K-12 collaborations to ensure young children are prepared for school entry.
- Continually conduct targeted NA and outreach to gauge demand for new/enhanced services and measure the success of ongoing activities.
- Engage in data-informed Strategic Plan and decision-making related to ECE programs.



Logic Model

Wisconsin's current PDG Logic Model identifies several short term, intermediate term, and long term desired outcomes as a result of its PDG work and investments. These include:

TABLE 25: Preliminary Outcomes Identified in Wisconsin's PDG Logic Model

Short-Term (1–2 Years)
<p>Increased knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better understanding of Wisconsin's ECE landscape, B-5 ECSS, and regional variation;• Improved data systems and coordinated needs assessments;• More providers that are equipped to implement affordable, high-quality practices;• More parents that understand their role in development, are empowered in their decision-making, and are informed about ECE policies and programs;• Identification of evidence-based ways to improve child and family well-being;• Identification of new funding models and policies to support and sustain the ECE workforce.
<p>Increased Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multi-sector partners engaged in development of needs assessment and strategic plan;• Improved processes and tools for sharing best practices with providers;• More opportunities and support for ECE workforce.
<p>Changes in Wisconsin's ECE System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removal of barriers and increased opportunities for professional development and education;• Improved tools for informing parents about quality and ECE options.



Medium-Term (3–4 years)
Increased Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better alignment of policies and procedures within ECE programs and related programs and services across the B-5 ECSS;• Smoother transitions between ECE and the early grades;• More affordable ECE options across Wisconsin;• Sustainable, community-based ECE programs that leverage public and private funds. Changes in Wisconsin’s ECE System <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More providers implementing high-quality practices;• Consistent messages about ECE programs;• Increased job satisfaction and retention among the ECE workforce;• Authentic and consistent representation of parent/family voice in policy across the B-5 ECSS.
Long-Term (5+ years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More children attending local, high-quality, affordable, culturally and linguistically responsive ECE programs that meet their families’ needs;• Coherent, collaborative, and integrated B-5 ECSS;• Stable ECE workforce including increased child care workforce compensation and decreased reliance on public assistance;• Compensation parity across the ECE workforce;• More children and families with improved health and educational outcomes; and• Reduced racial disparities in child outcomes, family outcomes, and in the B-5 ECSS.

What opportunities are currently underway involving development of measurable indicators to track progress in achieving the goals of this grant and Wisconsin’s strategic plan?

Wisconsin is actively working with its research partners to develop specific, measurable indicators of progress aligned to its strategic plan. Using the work that’s been completed to date, Wisconsin is partnering with the University of Wisconsin’s Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) to identify **appropriate data and metrics that Wisconsin’s can use to measure and indicate progress**. Wisconsin will embed these indicators in its 2021-23 PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan and update its Logic Model and Program Performance Evaluation Plan (PPEP) where appropriate. IRP will lead these efforts, to ensure success, DCF will work with both internal (i.e., departmental) and external (e.g., other agencies, community stakeholders, leadership groups) stakeholders to finalize and implement these efforts.



As Wisconsin updates its 2020 Needs Assessment and engages in the next round of strategic planning for 2023-25, it is committed to ensuring that its PDG work encompasses a broad, holistic picture of the needs of children and families across the B-5 ECSS. Wisconsin is partnering with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to help lead the 2022 Needs Assessment, which will include **a more extensive look at the conditions experienced by Wisconsin's vulnerable, underserved, and rural populations**. With this deeper dive into the lived experiences of Wisconsin's vulnerable, underserved, and rural children and families, Wisconsin stakeholders will be able to make more informed updates and identify more targeted strategies to improve outcomes for these children and families as part of its 2023-25 B-5 ECSS Strategic Plan.



VIII. ISSUES INVOLVING ECE FACILITIES

What issues have been identified involving ECE facilities?

Comprehensive Health Consultation: In December 2020 UW-School of Medicine, Dr. Dipesh Navsaria MPH, MSLIS, MD provided findings and recommendations to DCF following the completion of a needs assessment survey and policy scan to inform stakeholder needs and attitudes as well as inform the state of current policies implemented around health in ECE settings. (Source: [Child Care Health Consultation Needs Assessment Report, December 2020](#)) According to the Child Care Health Consultation Needs Assessment Report, “Many ECE providers reported using a combination of sources (both formal and informal) to help develop their health policies, which was evident through the variations noted between ECE providers during the policy scan. The national, “gold standard” Caring for Our Children (CFOC) standards on common inclusion/exclusion criteria due to illness health topics were utilized as a framework for evaluation and as a comparison with online ECE providers’ health policies and available resources offered by state organizations. Divergent comparison scores from the ECE providers’ health policies to the CFOC standards during the policy scan aligned with the survey findings that few ECE providers reported familiarity with the CFOC standards. In addition, various resources from state level organizations were noted to have recommendations that in some cases differed from the CFOC standards. ECE providers indicated value and interest in further support regarding the CFOC standards. Additionally, ECE providers expressed the need for health consultation including—yet not limited to—child health resources, answers to general questions, and review of health policies.”

Lead Exposure: According to [an analysis by Child Care Aware](#) that examined child care slots in high risk locations, over 100,000 children may attend child care programs where they are at high risk of lead exposure.

- Up to 88,125 children may attend child care programs in high risk locations that accept subsidies;
- Up to 14,112 children may attend child care programs in high risk locations that did not accept subsidies;
- 2,530 child care programs are in high risk locations.
- For this analysis, high risk locations were defined as “child care programs that were within 1 mile of a Toxics Release Inventory Site, and/or in the same zip code as a Superfund Site.” (Source: Child Care Aware)

Wisconsin has identified key concerns and issues related to ECE facilities as one of its priority areas for further analysis.

Looking Ahead: What innovative efforts are in place to improve ECE facilities?

In recognition of multiple bodies of research showing the long-term damage of lead exposure on developing brains, Wisconsin’s successful PDG grant proposed allocating funds to pilot a lead remediation grant fund for ECE providers. Still underway, the grant program stipulates that ECE providers may apply to DCF for funds needed to address clean water needs, including filter installation and maintenance, replacing lead fixtures, replacing lead service lines, bottled water, and clean water filling stations. Applications for use of the fund will help drive a greater understanding of infrastructure and facility needs and inform future policy and budget decisions that support funding lead remediation efforts. (Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG Application, 2019](#))



The continued collaboration between UW-Madison and Dr. Dipesh Navsaria MPH, MSLIS, MD aim to improve the quality of and access to early care and education programs by providing ECE providers/programs and regulators of ECE programs access to health consultation, training, and resources, such as policy templates reflective of best practice. The pilot program will recruit, hire/contract health consultation staff; create a centralized hub of resources (in English and Spanish), including online trainings, to help ECE providers/programs adopt and understand the Caring for Our Children (CFOC) guidelines and safety policies; and implement an early care and education health consultation pilot program to help guide early care and education providers/programs and regulation staff through health-related needs.

Finally, in addition to analyzing information collected through these efforts, Wisconsin will use its PDG-R outreach and research to address concerns about ECE facilities.



IX. OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREATER RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

What barriers currently exist to the funding and provision of high-quality ECE and supports?

As previously noted, DCF, DPI, and DHS administer most ECE programs and services at the state level, while Tribal Nations, counties, school districts, and other local and regional entities also provide direct services and supports within their areas. As a result, a patchwork of state, tribal, regional, and local entities are responsible for the provision of ECE programs and services using a variety of federal, state, local, and private funding sources. While Wisconsin’s locally driven system has substantial strengths, it also requires careful coordination and partnership to maximize efficiency and reduce fragmentation and overlap.

For example, Wisconsin’s state-level governance structure is unique in the country. DCF and DHS are led by Secretaries appointed by Wisconsin’s Governor with the advice and consent of the Wisconsin State Senate. As a result, leaders who oversee the state agencies and the individual divisions within them are political appointees who often change with administrations. DPI, on the other hand, is overseen by an independently elected, nonpartisan State Superintendent, whose four-year term does not run consecutively to that of the Governor. Similarly, the elected State Superintendent (who is both a constitutional officer and the head of an agency) also appoints division-level leaders. Wisconsin does not have a State Board of Education, which exists in many other states. Individual ECE programs are generally administered by state employees who are members of the classified civil service and are not subject to political appointments.

As a result of its unique political structure, strong cross-agency collaboration and coordination is necessary to build and sustain a successful system of ECE programs and services in Wisconsin. Coordinating bodies like Wisconsin’s ECAC have provided substantial support in this effort by ensuring that a strong and stable stakeholder table exists even when elected and appointed leadership changes.

There is also significant regional variation in terms of how ECE programs and services are supported across Wisconsin. Examples of opportunities for greater alignment across regions are identified in Table 26 below:

TABLE 26: Examples of Regional Variations in ECE Service Delivery

DCF - 5 Regions	DCF supports local agencies administering DCF programs (e.g., child welfare, child care, child support, and W-2 financial assistance) in 5 distinct regions. It utilizes staff within each of its five regions to better coordinate service delivery, technical assistance, and local and regional ECE partnerships.
CESAs - 12 Regions	Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) work in partnership with local school districts and DPI in 12 regions across Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Response to Intervention (RTI) Center, a collaboration between DPI and the CESA State Network, supports DPI’s work in early intervention.



DPI/WECCP - 3 Regions	<p>DPI, through its management of WECCP’s ECE braided funding and in partnership with CESA 5, supports outreach specialists in three regions. Outreach specialists also have statewide areas of focus, including WMELS training and serve on the PDG SLT. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Northeast Region Outreach Specialist with a statewide focus on 4K content and inclusion practices and statewide WMELS coordination;• A Northwest Region Outreach Specialist with a statewide focus on the content of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices with an emphasis on Tribal Nations; and• Southern Region Outreach Specialist with a statewide focus on the use of McKinney-Vento funding for homeless children.
CCR&Rs - 8 regions	<p>Wisconsin has 8 separate Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) regions to help families access child care.</p>
DHS - 5 Regions; 4 regions B3P	<p>While DHS, as a state agency, uses 5 regions for communication and coordination, individual programs within DHS may define regions differently. B3P has 4 regions, including technical assistance staff that support local programs, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) have regional centers and outreach specialists, as well.</p>

(Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Have there been successful efforts in the state at implementing strategies that have improved the efficient use of resources?

As described elsewhere, Wisconsin has numerous examples of successful efforts and multiple collaborations that foster the efficient use of resources across its ECE programs and services. A few examples of these include:

YoungStar (Wisconsin’s Quality Rating and Improvement System): By offering incentives to improve quality, Wisconsin’s YoungStar program efficiently targets resources to those child care centers working to boost quality and outcomes for children in an evidence-based way. Many ECE providers collaborate together and participate in YoungStar, as evidenced in the Table 27 below:



TABLE 27: YoungStar Partnerships as of 3/31/2021

	Standalone Head Start	Standalone Head Start with 4K Collaborations	Head Start Child Care Partners	4K Child Care Collaborations	YoungStar Providers
Kenosha/ Racine	3	2	5	10	213
Milwaukee	2	0	49	5	1,287
Northeastern	35	19	6	61	591
Northern	22	9	10	34	279
Southern	34	17	12	119	897
Western	33	12	6	53	487
Total	129	59	88	282	3,754

(Source: [YoungStar Monthly Report](#), March 2021, DCF)

Head Start State Supplement Grant: For many years, Wisconsin has supplemented its federally-funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs with additional state GPR funds. Administered by DPI, the annual \$6.2 million Wisconsin Head Start State Supplement Grant supports Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Wisconsin that do the following:

- “Serve additional children in addition to their federally funded slots. Programs may set a state cost per child that is over their federal cost per child with a demonstrated need to meet the Head Start Performance Standards.
- Use funds in a manner consistent with the guidance from the federal Office of Head Start for the Quality Improvement funding.
- Use funding to both add slots and fund quality initiatives in a manner consistent with the Office of Head Start guidance for Quality Improvement funding.” (Source: [Head Start State Supplement Grant: Allowable Use of State Funding](#), August 2020, DPI)

4K Community Approaches

The 4K Community Approach (4KCA) program is an innovative Wisconsin solution that encourages communities to merge Head Start, early intervention and special services, child care, and 4K into one program at multiple sites. [According to DPI’s 4KCA website:](#)



“Early childhood advocates consider the community approach (CA) the most logical, effective way to provide universal four-year-old kindergarten (4K). 4KCA relies on a comprehensive public-private partnership effort, sometimes called a “school-community interface.” Working together, a broad range of local early childhood players—as many as possible—forge a common approach to a common goal: the emotional, educational, societal, and physical well-being of children. Education and care are seen as two sides of the same coin. Through collaboration, 4KCA achieves more than the individual agencies acting independently.”

Communities throughout Wisconsin have taken advantage of this innovative approach to bring together ECE programs serving young children and families. Some of the benefits of and reasons for local communities to adopt Wisconsin’s innovative 4K Community Approach include:

- greater support and flexibility for working families;
- improved transitions for children moving from infant and toddler programs to preschool programs, and from preschool programs into the early grade;
- more equity and inclusion, including for children with special needs and dual language learners;
- increased parental knowledge of and access to resources;
- more ECE-wide professional development opportunities; and
- improved communication, collaboration, and efficiency across local and regional ECE networks.

4K Start Up Grants

For over a decade, Wisconsin has provided start-up grants to school districts seeking to begin a 4K program. As of 2020, nearly 99% of Wisconsin school districts that have elementary grades now offer 4K. The grant program—which also initially gave preference to school districts adopting 4K Community Approaches—has been so successful that DPI requested the program be sunset. According to [DPI’s 2021-23 Biennial Budget Request](#):

“The state’s 4K startup grant has been successful in helping districts implement 4K programs. In FY08, 283 school districts in the state had a 4K program in place; that grew to 319 school districts with a 4K program in FY09, the first year of the 4K startup grants. The number of 4K programs has risen every year since, though the rate of growth has started to decelerate, as most school districts have a program in place. Of the 421 school districts, 11 do not serve elementary grades; of the 410 school districts that do serve elementary grades (K-8 and K-12 districts), just five of them do not offer a 4K program (the school districts of Elmbrook, Germantown, Gibraltar, New Berlin, and Paris J1).”



Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners

The Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners braided and blended funding initiative utilizes funding from DPI, DCF, and DHS to support several key cross-agency initiatives, including:

- Training around the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards;
- Maintenance of the WECCP website, which includes a wealth of cross-sector collaborations and information;
- Funding and support for [three outreach specialists](#) across the state who support WMELS training in their regions and also have specific areas of focus to support ECE stakeholders statewide, including the regional outreach specialist detailed in Table 26.

Looking Ahead: What opportunities exist for a more efficient allocation of resources across the system?

Wisconsin has expanded its coalition of powerful policymakers and influencers who understand the interconnection between ECE and Wisconsin's economy, and are advocates for a strong and robust ECE system. This has been accomplished through coordinated leadership bodies including:

- the Governor's Leadership Council on Early Years (LCEY), created under PDG and which functions as a children's cabinet of state agency executives;
- the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC); and
- the Pritzker Children's Initiative-funded Wisconsin Infant Toddler Policy Project (WITPP).

For example, leaders at DCF and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) are working more closely than ever to connect economic development and ECE. This underscores the pivotal role that ECE plays as the backbone of Wisconsin's economy.

As noted in its 2020 PDG Renewal Application, this state leadership put Wisconsin in a considerable place of strength during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"Thanks to Wisconsin's leadership and its PDG-driven investment in new ECE champions and allies, Wisconsin was well positioned to prioritize ECE in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred during Wisconsin's PDG-funded efforts. With the support of the LCEY and ECAC, the Wisconsin Legislature approved \$51 million and Governor Evers allocated \$81 million for a total of \$131 million of its Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding toward ECE, one of the highest rates of CARES Act funding invested in ECE in the country. These funds were pivotal to stabilizing Wisconsin's child care programs and workforce, ensuring more families have a safe place to send their children so they can stay employed. In March 2020, roughly 40% of programs had temporarily closed. Thanks to these investments and the broad coalition of support behind them, that number is now down to 5%." (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))



Connected Focus on Workforce

Investing in early childhood is fundamental to the success of Wisconsin families and communities, and to a more secure economic future for all. In addition to the cross-agency work at the ECAC and LCEY, Wisconsin's PDG-R grant efforts focus on creating incentives for local collaboration and efficient, sustainable use of resources to support kids and families. For example, new local Workforce Grants and an expansion of multi-sector Community Innovation Grants (CIGs), which promote partnerships with business and community leaders to leverage greater support, collaboration, and investment in Wisconsin's ECE system, families, and economy.

Continued and Enhanced State-level ECE Program Coordination

By forming a standing group of Wisconsin's state-level ECE program administrators, Wisconsin will maximize opportunities for collaboration, reduce fragmentation and overlap, and enhance resource efficiency across state and federal funding sources. Using CCDBG, IDEA, and ESSA federal funding—as well as state funding sources and capacity—Wisconsin can further enhance its system of ECE programs and services and support the broader B-5 ECSS.



X. TRANSITION SUPPORTS AND GAPS

Wisconsin has a wealth of transition support for families as children move from early childhood into the early grades. While several statewide efforts—from collaborative 4K Community Approaches to the widely-utilized Wisconsin Model Learning Standards and efforts around ECE professional development—are areas of strength. While Wisconsin has a strong foundation, more can and is being done to support families as they navigate the transition process.

What are the strengths of Wisconsin’s transition supports for children moving from ECE to school entry?

Wisconsin’s long-standing history of successful collaborations has resulted in many strong transitions supports for children moving through ECE and into the early grades. Some of these include:

4K Community Approaches

The 4KCA program is an innovative, locally driven solution that encourages communities to merge their ECE efforts—including Head Start, early intervention and early childhood special education, child care, and 4K into a single program at multiple sites. One obvious benefit to this approach is that it smooths transitions for children. According to DPI, “The 4K Community Approach program makes it possible for children to remain in the same facility for 4K and child care. Transitions, as many parents know, are difficult for young children. Fewer transitions maximize time available for learning, facilitates the children’s adjustment to kindergarten and child care, and reduces the stress of being away from home. With care and education in the same facility, children don’t have to spend time traveling from one place to another. When they arrive, they can settle into a single building until it is time for them to go home.” (Source: [DPI](#))

Wisconsin’s Model Early Learning Standards

Wisconsin’s Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) are utilized by ECE programs across the state. Aligned to Wisconsin K-12 academic standards, the WMELS are a research and evidence-based framework for families, ECE and K-12 professionals, and policymakers to:

- “Share a common language and responsibility for the well-being of children from birth to first grade;
- Know and understand developmental expectations of young children; and
- Understand the connection among the foundations of early childhood, K-12 educational experiences, and lifelong learning. With the inclusion of the birth-to-3 age range, the revised WMELS also includes developmental continuums, sample behaviors of children, and sample strategies for adults.” (Source: [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards, 5th Edition](#)),

The WECCP publishes the WMELS and provides statewide training on the standards through funding provided by DCF, DHS, and DPI. Further, ECE programs that incorporate WMELS in their environment, activities, and/or curriculum are recognized within YoungStar.



Wisconsin Core Competencies for Professionals Working with Young Children and their Families

In order to create a “common language for the Birth to First Grade workforce similar to the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards,” Wisconsin developed the Wisconsin Core Competencies for Professionals Working with Young Children and Their Families. First established in 2007 and updated in 2014, these core competencies “create a common thread of Professional Development expectations across the variety of system partners (Higher Education, Child Care, Head Start, 4 & 5 year-old Kindergarten, Special Education, Child Welfare, Home Visiting, Health & Mental Health, Afterschool, Advocacy, and others) for the ultimate benefit of children and families in Wisconsin.” (Source: [Wisconsin Core Competencies for Professionals Working with Young Children and their Families](#), 2014)

Described in greater detail below, Wisconsin invested substantial time and resources in ECE professional development under its successful Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant.

Collaborative Agreements Between School Districts, Head Start, and other ECE Providers

Another way that school districts and other ECE providers are working together to address transitions are through collaborative agreements as required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Under ESSA, local education agencies (LEAs) receiving Title I funding are required to develop written agreements with Head Start—and other early childhood providers if feasible—to increase coordination. DPI [provides guidance to school districts](#) on how to structure these agreements to ensure that all kindergarteners have the support that they need to succeed. Per DPI, collaborative agreements between school districts and ECE providers “must include the following:

- **Records Transfer:** Developing and implementing a systematic procedure for transferring records
- **Ongoing Communication:** Establishing channels of communication to coordinate programs
- **Family Involvement:** Conducting meetings with parents and teachers from both entities to discuss the developmental and other needs of individual children
- **Joint Professional Development:** Organizing and participating in joint professional development
- **Linked Services:** Linking the educational services provided by the LEA with Head Start.” (Source: [Title I Early Childhood Requirements](#), DPI)

How are parents currently provided with information about transitions?

Wisconsin has numerous statewide resources and structures to promote family engagement in their child’s development and successful transitions from ECE into elementary school. However, individual state agencies and Head Start each have their own materials and resources for families which are spread across numerous websites, not always connected to one another, nor easily accessible to providers and families.



To support ECE provider and family success, family engagement and partnership approaches must be better aligned at the state level. During PDG-R, Wisconsin is undertaking the following family engagement activities:

TABLE 28: PDG-R Family Engagement Activities

Desired Outcome	Family Engagement Action
Shared Vision of Family Engagement	Organizational leadership will provide resources (funding, support staff, access to organization/agency decision-makers) to increase state-level expertise and structures, ultimately resulting in a shared vision of family engagement across ECE systems.
Review and Alignment of Family Engagement Policies	A review of each state agency’s commitment to, definition of, and guidance (such as Family Engagement Frameworks) around family engagement activities. This includes a review of existing policies and/or requirements (such as YoungStar, IDEA Parts C and B, ESSA, 4K family outreach, and Head Start parent curricula) to identify commonalities, differences and potential improvements and/or policy recommendations. It will also cover connections and supports for families from Native Nations and multilingual families.
Updated and Connected Family Resources	A comprehensive review of current resources (for families and providers) that are available within each organization’s website, resulting in updated and connected resources, with a primary entry point, for ease of accessibility by all providers and families.

(Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

The Equity Advisory Council (EAC), described in greater detail below, will be engaged in this review process, which will include intentional connections to, and feedback loops with, programs and families to collaboratively develop and strengthen family engagement policies and strategies as well as alignment. The needs and concerns of multilingual families (including translation and interpretation services), Native American families, families of color, families with children with disabilities, and families experiencing homelessness will be prioritized. This statewide review will be repeated every two years to ensure that family engagement strategies are effective, meaningful, and culturally and linguistically responsive, ultimately resulting in inclusive family engagement strategies across the ECE landscape. Wisconsin’s efforts to partner with families will help to ensure Wisconsin’s ECSS is meeting the diversity of family needs. It will also be part of the PDG-R evaluation in an effort to ensure efficacy and continue to strengthen this priority. (Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

The State Superintendent’s Advisory Council on 4K and 4K Community Approaches has also advocated for improved cross-sector family and community engagement activities, including a funding and policy scan and efforts to “develop and disseminate consistent evidence-based technical assistance to early care and education providers to support implementation of effective practices for community and family engagement.”



As a department, DPI has been engaged in a “multi-year process to identify how we have been engaging families and what needs to be done to provide meaningful support to districts to move beyond family involvement toward true family engagement.” (Source: [December Council Recommendations Report: State Superintendent Response Letter](#), 2020)

What innovative efforts are underway to improve transitions?

In addition to the extensive family engagement activities described above, Wisconsin has an explicit focus on improving transitions from ECE to the early grades woven throughout its PDG-R efforts. For example:

Community Innovation Grants

Under PDG-R, communities will have the opportunity to apply for Community Innovation Grants to fund locally-driven ECE priorities. Wisconsin will award bonus points to applicants who pursue a local pilot or expansion of an existing effort that supports smoothing transitions and alignment of services for children and families across ECE into kindergarten and the early grades.

Interagency Collaborative on Early Years

Wisconsin is forming an Interagency Cooperative on Early Years (ICEY), described in greater detail below. By leveraging the collective expertise of the state’s ECE program directors at the state agency level, Wisconsin will be better positioned to make strategic connections and alignment at the program level and support local efforts by providing best practices, and/or reviewing outcomes of CIGs focused on collaborative transition and alignment from birth-early grades. Examples of transition efforts envisioned for the ICEY include:

- Collaborative approaches to 4K and/or 3K in local communities;
- A common framework for authentic family engagement;
- Support for local communities seeking to implement a shared curriculum or shared curricular strategies across child care/Head Start/4K programs;
- Shared/co-located professional development opportunities between school districts and community-based ECE programs (trauma-informed practices; social-emotional development; early intervention practices, etc.);
- Enhanced local data sharing efforts to promote information sharing about children as they move within ECE programs and child care into 4K/K and the early grades; and/or
- Collaborative consultation and coaching models around early intervention, developmentally appropriate practices, prevention of suspension/expulsion from ECE, etc.
- Expanding state agency capacity to support multilingual learners through WIDA Early Years State Planning.

(Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG-R Application, 2020](#))



Looking Ahead to the 2022 Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Wisconsin has identified the need to improve data on transitions supports and reduce gaps in data between ECE programs and school entry. This can be done by sharing data as children move from ECE into the early grades (e.g., sharing early assessment data and other information learned about a child prior to school entry) and will be a priority area for its 2022 Needs Assessment. In addition to examining the strengths and weaknesses of transition supports, Wisconsin will examine supports targeted to vulnerable or underserved children and families, including children with developmental delays or other special needs and multilingual children and families.

Further, as noted above, transitions will be a top focus of the newly-formed ICEY. In addition to their program specific expertise, the ICEY will be able to tap into national resources available to assist states in improving successful transitions (including [a toolkit for states, LEAs, and ECE programs](#) produced by the Council of Chief State School Officers) to help maximize the opportunities for transition collaboration at the state, regional, and local levels.



XI. SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

What policies and practices are in place that support or hinder interagency collaboration?

Wisconsin has a long and rich history of successful collaboration around early childhood. The strength of Wisconsin's partnerships supporting its youngest citizens have led to many of Wisconsin's successful ECE initiatives including:

- the development of YoungStar;
- near universal 4K and collaborative approaches to 4K that engage Head Start and local child care; and
- Wisconsin's successful Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC), which allowed Wisconsin to build an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).

While more can be done to improve on Wisconsin's collaborations, the state's PDG efforts have started from a place of strength.

Wisconsin ECE Programs and Infrastructure

Wisconsin's system of ECE is unique within state government. Whereas other programs and systems within state government often fall within the purview of a single state agency, Wisconsin's system of ECE programs and services requires careful coordination among three state agencies—DCF, DPI, and DHS. These three state agencies are each responsible for administering most state and many federal programs that support the healthy development, physical, social, and emotional well-being, and educational preparation of children ages B-5. These agencies partner with Head Start agencies, Tribal Nations located in Wisconsin, higher education, a variety of ECE organizations, and many others to support the various aspects of early care and education throughout the state. Further, the ECE workforce is similarly unique, representing professionals across many programs including child care, Head Start, four- and five-year-old kindergarten, early intervening services, home visitation, and health programs.

As a result, several leadership and coordinating bodies have been formed to facilitate vision, direction, policy initiatives, and budget requests for ECE. They include:

The Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council

The [Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council](#) (ECAC) is Wisconsin's State Advisory Council as required under the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 and CCDBG Act of 2014. It is the primary venue for state-level multi-sector stakeholder engagement, needs assessment development, and statewide strategic planning for ECE. Chaired by the DCF Secretary and Wisconsin's elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the ECAC consists of 36 stakeholders in positions to lead and implement change across the B-5 mixed delivery system.

Leadership Council on Early Years

Formed in 2020 under PDG, the [Leadership Council on Early Years](#) (LCEY) is a cross-section of state agency heads who have answered the Governor's call to engage in bold systems change to support Wisconsin's vulnerable or underserved children ages B-5. The LCEY is focused on accelerating strategic connections



and systems alignment within Wisconsin state agencies whose work affects children and families and complements the work of the multi-sector ECAC in achieving Wisconsin's vision and goals. LCEY members include leaders of the following state agencies:

- Office of the Governor & the First Lady
- Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
- Department of Health Services (DHS)
- Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB)
- Department of Administration (DOA)
- Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP)
- Department of Corrections (DOC)
- Department of Financial Institutions (DFI)
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Department of Revenue (DOR)
- Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS)
- Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Department of Tourism (DOT)
- Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA)
- Department of Workforce Development (DWD)
- Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH)
- Office of Commissioner of Insurance (OCI)
- Public Service Commission (PSC)
- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)
- Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

Wisconsin's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)

ECIDS was implemented in December 2017 as a tool to support regular data exchanges as well as ad hoc research requests across agencies. The ECIDS has established early childhood data linkages between the DPI, DHS, and DCF. "The use of the ECIDS will result in better outcomes for Wisconsin children, families and communities by providing the participating agencies' (currently DCF, DPI and DHS) internal researchers, content specialists and analysts with cross-departmental information to guide decisions about investing



resources in effective, sustainable strategies while maintaining privacy, confidentiality and departmental accountability.” (Source: [ECIDS](#))

Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners

Since 1994, DPI, DCF, and DHS have partnered together through the [Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners](#) (WECCP). With a mission that “all children will be healthy, nurtured, safe, and successful,” the WECCP have successfully developed and/or coordinated a number of ECE innovations and collaborations, including:

- [The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#), which specify expectations for children birth to first grade. Since their creation in 2004, the WMELS have embodied a unique partnership among state agencies, ECE organizations, providers, and educators to promote a shared agenda of excellence and quality in ECE programs and services for families and young children. In 2019, 35 training sessions were held that reached 568 participants from across ECE (including family and group child care, public schools, tribes, special education and early intervention, and Head Start). (Source: [WECCP](#))
- The [Wisconsin Early Childhood Cross-Sector Professional Development Initiative](#)—Funded under Wisconsin’s successful Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant, this initiative worked with an extensive array of ECE partners to refine cross-sector structures and increase access to high-quality and consistent early childhood professional development. Although this group has not met since the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant funding ended, the work was vitally important and serves as a blue-print for future collaboration and partnerships. Some of the cross-sector committees and workgroups that contributed to these efforts included:
 - Regional Action Teams (Milwaukee/Southeast, North, Northeast, Southern, Western)
 - Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Steering and Leadership Committee
 - Early Learning Workgroup
 - Pyramid Model Advisory Committee
 - Early Childhood Dual Language Learners Initiative
 - Wisconsin State Task Force on Homelessness in Early Childhood
 - Inclusion Workgroup
 - Healthy Children Committee
 - Screening and Assessment Workgroup
 - Kindergarten Entrance Assessment Workgroup
 - State Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and Community Approaches
 - Early Childhood Tribal Workgroups: Tribal-State Relationships and Tribal Early Childhood

More information about the Wisconsin Early Childhood Cross-Sector Professional Development Initiative is available in its [5-year report \(January 2013-December 2017\)](#). WECCP collaboration is funded by multiple partners. “The braided funds are provided by the Department of Public Instruction (Individuals with Disabilities



Part B 619, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act), the Department of Children and Families (Division of Early Care and Education), and the Department of Health Services (Division of Public Health—Maternal and Child Health Program). The Department of Public Instruction is the fiscal agent that staffs and coordinates the effort.” (Source: [Wisconsin Early Childhood Cross-Sector Professional Development Initiative](#))

Governor’s Birth to 3 Interagency Coordinating Council

[The Governor’s Birth to Three Interagency Coordinating Council](#) (ICC). The ICC was established by the Governor to advise and assist DHS “in the performance of the responsibilities established under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Part C of IDEA regulates the establishment and responsibilities of the council under [Subpart G—State Interagency Coordinating Council](#). The mission of the ICC is to advise, review, analyze, and monitor the implementation of the State’s early intervention system, maintain a forum for communication relative to early intervention, and make recommendations to DHS regarding the effective implementation of the early intervention system.” (Source: DHS)

State Superintendent’s Advisory Council on 4K and 4K Community Approaches

Per DPI, “[the State Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on Four-Year-Old Kindergarten \(4K\) and 4K Community Approaches](#) was created in 2006 as school districts and community partners were beginning to implement 4K within various community settings, offering 4K Community Approaches as developmentally appropriate option for four year old children around the state. Since that time, the council has continued to provide guidance to Wisconsin’s State Superintendent, to implement and strengthen community approaches to the provision of 4K services for the children of Wisconsin. This council is made up of stakeholders from the child care, Head Start, public school, and high education communities.” In 2020, this Council made [recommendations to the State Superintendent](#) reinforcing the need for a strong statewide and regional ECE infrastructure, effective cross-sector family and community engagement. Source: DPI, State Superintendent’s Advisory Council on 4K and 4K Community Approaches)

Regional Collaboration

Many ECE and family support programs in the B-5 mixed delivery system are implemented directly at the local level, and there is substantial latitude in program and policy implementation across sovereign Tribal Nations located within WI’s borders, counties, school districts, and municipal governments. As a result, local and regional partnerships are key to the success of Wisconsin’s early childhood systems. Many of these regional structures are described in earlier sections of this report.

DCF currently supports local agencies administering DCF programs (e.g., child welfare, child care, child support, and W-2). In PDG, DCF established Regional Workgroups and a State Leadership Team to oversee regional alignment of its PDG efforts. Moving forward, Wisconsin will build on this work and engage DPI, DHS, and other agencies as appropriate to address regional fragmentation and overlap and identify additional opportunities to strengthen local and regional support networks.



Looking Ahead: ICEY, EAC, and Authentic Parent/Family Engagement

While Wisconsin has multiple interagency collaborations and two strong leadership bodies with LCEY and ECAC, there is no complementary standing working group of the state’s core ECE program, content, and policy staff across different divisions within DCF, DPI, and DHS. In response, Wisconsin is working to establish an Interagency Cooperative on Early Years (ICEY), comprised of core, state-administered ECE program administrators, content experts, and policy advisors who will work on an ongoing and proactive basis together to improve interagency coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, and, ultimately, delivery of services to children B-5 and their families. Envisioned ICEY membership is outlined below in Table 29.

TABLE 29: Overview of Planned Interagency Cooperative on Early Years (ICEY)

State Agency	Core ECE Program *Example: Connected B-5 State Agency Programs and Services	Lead Agency Participants (Core state-level ECE program administrators and policy staff, who also serve as connection points to other B-5 ECSS services within their agencies as needed)
DCF	Child Care Head Start Collaboration Office *Connections to home visiting, child welfare, etc.	Division of Early Care and Education - Child Care Division of Early Care and Education - HS/EHS coordinator Division of Early Care and Education - PDG and WITPP policy and data capacity
DPI	4K/4KCA, ECSE *Connections to ESSA (Title I, Title III, etc.) programs serving vulnerable or underserved populations; nutrition programs; ECIDS	Division for Academic Excellence - Teaching and Learning Team; Early Childhood; Title III Division for Learning Support - Special Education Team; (ECSE)/IDEA Part B; Division for Student and School Success - Title I Data and policy capacity as needed during PDG-R
DHS	Birth to 3 Program *Connections to Medicaid Services; Public Health	Division of Medicaid Services - Birth to 3 Program/IDEA Part C; Data and policy capacity as needed during PDG-R

(Source: [Wisconsin’s PDG-R Application, 2020](#))



Wisconsin is utilizing PDG-R funds and staff to create enough capacity to successfully launch and support the initial years of this effort:

- support DCF, DPI, and DHS staff engaged in ECE program oversight and management staff to more intentionally integrate and connect their work together;
- address key data capacity needs within each agency;
- create an inventory of ECE activities and resources funded and supported by each agency;
- support interagency liaison needs; and
- facilitate meetings

While the ICEY will focus on core ECE program alignment and cohesion, members from each agency will also serve as connection points back to other agency resources focused across the B-5 ECSS, as well as resources for the ECAC and ICEY. (Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))

Equity Advisory Council and Family Engagement

While Wisconsin already has structures that allow families to play a key role in shaping state-level policies, these family groups are siloed across DCF, DPI, DHS, OCMH, etc. Additionally, Wisconsin's efforts to integrate equity across the ECSS has similarly been siloed and with differing impact. Through the WITPP efforts and further supported with PDG-R funding, Wisconsin will establish a new Equity Advisory Council (EAC).

The EAC will be comprised of at least 30% lived experience partners that will include parents/caregivers connected to Wisconsin's ECSS, as well as ECE teachers, providers and other diverse stakeholders. The parents/caregivers will ideally represent families from native nations and other families of color, multilingual families, families experiencing homelessness, families connected to IDEA, families connected with experience into the child welfare system, and families disconnected from Wisconsin's ECE system.

This group will be responsible for identifying an equity framework that will be used with all policy recommendations coming out of the WITPP and ECAC. It will support the equitable implementation of Wisconsin's Preschool Development Grant efforts. The equity framework will ensure that policies and programs equitably improve family communication, access, and engagement with Wisconsin's B-5 ECSS in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways. It will also help strengthen and better align programs, policies, and practices in more equitable family-focused ways.

The EAC will play a key role in the PDG-R by:

- ensuring that equity is central to the needs assessment and strategic plan;
- strengthening communication and engagement of families, ECE providers, and communities;
- reviewing data using an equity lens;
- identifying opportunities for continuous quality improvement; and
- ensuring that needed systems change work is informed by lived experience stakeholders.



The EAC will:

- support two-way communications between families, ECE programs, and the state.
- solicit input from ECE providers serving diverse communities and from already-existing state and local parent advisory and family leadership groups for the equity framework, 2022 needs assessment and updated strategic plan, and other efforts.

Parent advisory and family leadership groups in Wisconsin include:

- The State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council (PAC) provides advice to the state superintendent on family engagement in student learning. The PAC offers members the opportunity to learn about state education programs and priorities, while encouraging parents to share information about effective practices in their schools and communities.
- Parent representatives of Wisconsin's ICC, which plays an advisory role to assist DHS in the performance of the responsibilities established under Part C of IDEA.
- Parents with experiences connected to Wisconsin's OCMH, which supports Wisconsin's children in achieving their optimal social and emotional well-being, including a focus on infants and toddlers. OCMH convenes stakeholders to improve the children's mental health system and access to treatment, and includes families with experiences in mental health (including that of parents of young children).
- The DCF Division of Safety and Permanence's (DSP) Parents Supporting Parents program pairs parents who were formerly involved with the child welfare system and have successfully reunified or resolved and closed their case, with parents who are newly involved with the child welfare system and have children in foster or kinship care. The program aims to empower these parents with lived child welfare experience as mentors called Parent Partners. Parent Partner' direct experiences with the child welfare system and ability to offer hope and realistic advice makes this program highly effective and, in Iowa, has shown to increase reunification.
- The Parent Affiliate of the Wisconsin Head Start Association is a group of parent leaders with children enrolled in HS who play an advisory role to WHSA. HS Policy Councils, which are responsible for the design and implementation of HS programs at the agency and/or delegate levels, include parent engagement and parent partnership strategies.

As proposed in PDG-R, parent representatives of the EAC will be compensated for their time, including travel and child care needs, as well as outreach activities they do on behalf of the State of Wisconsin. A parent coach will support the EAC parent representatives to ensure they receive adequate support, preparation, and coaching to be able to authentically participate in EAC meetings. The EAC will also incorporate protocols to ensure lived experience partners are authentically included and recognized by the system as critical partners, power is shared, and lived experience perspective is central to a balance of power that allow parent perspectives are central to EAC discussions and decisions. Translation and interpretation services will also be available.

(Source: [Wisconsin's PDG-R Application, 2020](#))



As noted throughout this document the success of comprehensively addressing the needs of children B-5 in Wisconsin is made possible with the support of the many engaged stakeholders and partners including parents and caregivers, ECE teachers and professionals, community advocates, business leaders, Head Start agencies, Tribal Nations, state agency staff and leaders, LCEY, ECAC, Regional Workgroups, CCR&R's, school districts, and institutes of higher education.

Wisconsin will continue to expand on its initial needs assessment work to address domains and questions that it was unable to address in 2020. Moving forward, Wisconsin will substantially broaden its agenda to examine data across ECE and the B-5 ECSS and analyze a wide spectrum of needs and issues, such as health, education, food insecurity, and stable housing, that contribute to the healthy development and success of young children in the state. Given the stark racial differences that were surfaced across indicators for poverty, education, health, and housing, it will also be critical to examine the impact of structural and systemic racism on the experience and outcomes of children and families in the ECE and broader B-5 ECSS systems. A more comprehensive needs assessment will be published in 2022 that incorporates these additional elements.

Starting with the 2022 update, future iterations of Wisconsin's B-5 Needs Assessment will more comprehensively address the B-5 ECSS and further reflect the spectrum of needs of children B-5 and their families (including health, mental health, early intervention, school readiness, and more). Going forward, Wisconsin will also make a more concerted effort to engage families directly to ensure that state and local policymakers and providers are learning from the wealth and diversity of knowledge, strengths, and perspectives that families bring to the table. Wisconsin will continue to periodically update its B-5 Needs Assessment to incorporate new data, related needs assessments, ongoing research, and other pertinent information to help inform updated strategic planning efforts. These further iterations will reflect alignment to the state's Head Start Collaboration Office needs assessments and goal setting efforts that are also aligned to and informed by the state's strategic plan. Ultimately, Wisconsin aims to adopt an ongoing biennial schedule for updating its needs assessment—and its related strategic plan—so as to fully align with Wisconsin's biennial state budget process. This alignment will help ensure that state early childhood leaders and advocates are unified around a common, comprehensive B-5 ECSS strategic agenda, and allow state agencies who oversee ECE and related programs to advance budget recommendations in line with that shared agenda.



Appendix A: Wisconsin Counties Rural to Urban by USDA 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Code

County	Population	Code	Code Definition
Florence County	4,423	9	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area
Forest County	9,304	9	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area
Iron County	5,916	9	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area
Price County	14,159	9	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area
Vilas County	21,430	9	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area
Adams County	20,875	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Bayfield County	15,014	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Buffalo County	13,587	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Burnett County	15,457	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Lafayette County	16,836	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Marquette County	15,404	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Menominee County	4,232	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Pepin County	7,469	8	Nonmetro - Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
Ashland County	16,157	7	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
Crawford County	16,644	7	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
Juneau County	26,664	7	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
Oneida County	35,998	7	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
Sawyer County	16,557	7	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
Washburn County	15,911	7	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
Barron County	45,870	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Clark County	34,690	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Door County	27,785	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Dunn County	43,857	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Grant County	51,208	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Green Lake County	19,051	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Jackson County	20,449	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Langlade County	19,977	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Lincoln County	28,743	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Marinette County	41,749	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Monroe County	44,673	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Polk County	44,205	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area



Richland County	18,021	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Rusk County	14,755	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Shawano County	41,949	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Taylor County	20,689	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Trempealeau Co	28,816	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Vernon County	29,773	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Waupaca County	52,410	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Waushara County	24,496	6	Nonmetro - Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
Dodge County	88,759	4	Nonmetro - Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
Jefferson County	83,686	4	Nonmetro - Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
Manitowoc County	81,442	4	Nonmetro - Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
Portage County	70,019	4	Nonmetro - Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
Sauk County	61,976	4	Nonmetro - Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
Walworth County	102,228	4	Nonmetro - Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
Calumet County	48,971	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Chippewa County	62,415	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Eau Claire County	98,736	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Fond du Lac County	101,633	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
La Crosse County	114,638	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Marathon County	134,063	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Outagamie County	176,695	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Racine County	195,408	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Rock County	160,331	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Sheboygan County	115,507	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Winnebago County	166,994	3	Metro - Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
Brown County	248,007	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Columbia County	56,833	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Dane County	488,073	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Douglas County	44,159	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Green County	36,842	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Iowa County	23,687	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Kewaunee County	20,574	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Oconto County	37,660	2	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
Kenosha County	166,426	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
Milwaukee County	947,735	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
Ozaukee County	86,395	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
Pierce County	41,019	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
St. Croix County	84,345	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
Washington County	131,887	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
Waukesha County	389,891	1	Metro - Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more



Appendix B: Map of Wisconsin's Counties

