

# Early Care and Education 2025-27 Budget Overview

Wisconsin's 2025-27 state budget included regulation changes and funding opportunities for child care. Below is core information on these budget items. **Use the QR code** on the second page to access the most up-to-date information and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

## Assistant Child Care Teachers (Wis. Stat. 48.65(4)(b))

16-year-olds may serve as assistant teachers under the supervision of child care teachers in **group child care** programs.

This change to statute is currently in effect and supersedes the provisions in DCF 251 that list different age and education requirements for assistant child care teachers.

A public hearing was held on this proposed rule change with expected implementation in August 2026.

## Large Family Child Care (Wis. Stat. 48.65(3)(a))

The biennial budget bill modified Wisconsin statute 48.65 to allow DCF to license family child care programs up to 12 children. DCF must approve any increase in capacity for licensed family child care.

A public hearing was held on this proposed rule change with expected implementation in August 2026.

## Group Child Care Ratios (Wis. Admin Code DCF 251)

The budget created a two-year pilot program that changes staff-to-child ratios for children 18-30 months to 1:7.

Group programs may now implement the new pilot ratios of 1:7 for children 18-30 months **if they meet all other applicable administrative rules**, such as space requirements, equipment and furnishings, licensed capacity, etc.

The ratio table in DCF 251.055 was changed in the budget bill and is **now in effect**. **Without legislative action, ratios will go back to the previous ones on August 1, 2027.**

The staff-to-child ratio tables in DCF 202.08(6) and 250.055 were **not** changed, so the ratios for certified and licensed family child care programs remain the same.



# Early Care and Education 2025-27 Budget Overview *(continued)*

## Enhanced Payments Pilot (2025 WI Act 25, Section 9106(2m))

A **two-year pilot program** to increase per-child payments to licensed providers caring for infants and toddlers with a Wisconsin Shares authorization.

- For children **0-18 months old**: \$200/month for full-time care
- For children **18-30 months old**: \$100/month for full-time care

To be eligible, providers will need **to participate in increased ratios** for children 18-30 months old.

Group programs may now certify for Enhanced Payments in the Child Care Provider Portal.

## Family Affordability (2025 WI Act 25, Section 176)

- Over **\$123 million** to increase Wisconsin Shares subsidy rates

Effective October 1, 2025 Wisconsin Shares were increased. Maximum rates will be at or above or above the price of 75% of child care slots.

## Child Care Bridge Payments (2025 WI Act 25, Section 9106(3m))

- **\$110 million** for direct payments to providers in the first year of the budget
- The first payment was in **August 2025**
- These **Child Care Bridge Payments** will ensure continued support through **June 2026, with final payment issued in July 2026**

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 contact the Bureau of Early Care Regulation at [dcfclicreg@wisconsin.gov](mailto:dcfclicreg@wisconsin.gov) or 608-421-7550. 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.

## Get Kids Ready (Wis. Stat. 49.132)

A **new elementary school readiness initiative** to support licensed or certified child care providers serving four-year-old children.

- This will begin for the **2026-27 school year**
- Providers are eligible if they:
  - Will provide at least **437 hours** of instruction in elementary school readiness per year
  - Use a curriculum that meets the **Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards**
- Teachers in the elementary school readiness program must have an associate or bachelor's degree

Child Care Providers' Intent to Participate is posted on our website. The Program Eligibility Verification will open in April 2026.

## DCF will keep you informed

We recognize that information is quickly evolving and will likely continue to do so for the coming months as our implementation plans take shape.

**Scan the QR code to see the latest updates on Biennial Budget implementation!**

