

WECA: Poll - statewide support for investments in early childhood education

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[Madison] –Wisconsin voters view high-quality, affordable early care and education as an essential service that benefits all residents, and they strongly support a plan to invest \$60 million annually in state funding to expand access to early care and education programs, improve early childhood educator training, and prevent child care program closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the Wisconsin Infant Toddler Policy Project (WITPP), Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) has recently completed a statewide poll with the bipartisan research team of New Bridge Strategy and FM3 Research of 605 Wisconsin voters on issues related to early care and education. Key findings show that 93% of all voters, including nearly 90% of Republican voters, agree that early care and education programs are crucial for parents to be able to work and contribute to the economy. More than three-quarters agree that high-quality, affordable child care is an essential service like education and health care (78% agree).

The WITPP recommends the state invest \$60 million annually in the 2021-23 state budget to help parents remain in the workforce and prevent child care program closures as Wisconsin emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. The budget request includes:

- \$30 million to create an infant toddler stabilization fund that is targeted at child care programs operating below full capacity
- \$20 million to expand the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy for low-income working families
- \$9.9 million to create pilot programs in high need areas of the state where infant

and toddler care would be reimbursed at the actual cost of care. Polling results show strong support for increased state investments in early care and education. Wisconsin voters overwhelmingly support recruiting and retaining qualified early childhood educators (83% support), increasing the number of early care and education programs in high-poverty areas of the state (80%), increasing the number of early care and education programs in areas of the state where they are least available now (76%), and increasing the compensation of early childhood educators (75%).

The statewide poll demonstrates the broad bipartisan support among Wisconsin voters for increased state investment in early care and education. This assistance will enable programs to serve more children, improve training and compensation for educators, and stop the potential closure of programs during the pandemic.

With strong bipartisan support, investing in child care to ensure parents are able to work and the state's economy can recover from COVID-19 must be a budget priority.