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Dept. of Children and Families: Awards $10 million in Partner Up! grants to keep economy moving

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) today announced the award of $10 million in Partner Up! grants to 88 businesses statewide. The grants, which are part of DCF's Project Growth grant program, aim to help solve the challenges facing Wisconsin's child care system and bolster the state's economy.

"Governor Evers and his administration understand that the value of child care cannot be overstated. It the work that allows all other work and is critical to helping our economy and communities thrive," said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. "Our Project Growth grant program is a prime example of how the administration is connecting the dots and building innovative partnerships. With these grants, businesses can offer attractive benefits and stay competitive in a tight labor market while also supporting local child care providers in their community."

The Partner Up! grant program, administered by our partner, Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA), focuses on supporting partnerships between businesses and child care providers by offering funding to businesses that purchase slots for employees' children at existing regulated child care providers. Eighty-eight businesses statewide, ranging from child care and health care to retail and manufacturing, will receive funding based on the true cost of care, number of slots, and age group. To view the list of other Partner Up! grant recipients, visit DCF's Project Growth page.

To help design a grant program that met the needs of Wisconsin employers and communities, DCF surveyed nearly 1,000 employers from every county in the state,

across a wide range of industries. The results highlighted the importance of child care to the state's economy and workforce with 73% of respondents agreeing that providing employees with resources to support their child care needs is a strategy that all employers should consider to address workforce/labor shortages. However, many respondents cited barriers in providing such benefits, with a majority stating federal or state government incentives would increase the likelihood that their company could implement or expand child care resources.

The Partner Up! grants are one component of the Project Growth grant program, which is funded through the state's $30 million Preschool Development Grant – Birth to 5 (PDG B-5) award, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The second component, the Dream Up! supply-building grant program, focuses on building child care supply through a collaborative community approach. In June 2022, DCF awarded grants to 28 cross-sector community teams. There will be another cohort for Dream Up! in early 2023. Interested communities are encouraged to sign up for DCF's grant updates listserv by visiting the Project Growth website.

Project Growth is one of many investments the Evers Administration has made to stabilize and grow the early care and education industry. Governor Evers and DCF Secretary Amundson have invested over $824 million in federal relief funds and implemented multiple programs and initiatives in communities across the state. These transformational investments have significantly reduced the number of permanent and temporary closures of regulated child care providers and helped bring together child providers, communities, and businesses to find sustainable solutions and partnerships.

To learn more about Project Growth and upcoming grant opportunities, visit DCF's Project Growth page.