

Evers campaign: Gov. Evers makes child care more affordable and fills job openings

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MADISON, Wis. — Today, the Cap Times [profiled](#) how Governor Tony Evers' Workforce Innovation Grant program is expanding affordable child care and filling job openings by training the next generation of manufacturing workers.

In December, Gov. Evers travelled across the state to [announce](#) 12 new regional projects that are designed to fill job openings by creating apprenticeships, affordable child care programs, and training opportunities. Wisconsin has long struggled with workforce shortages, and the pandemic sure hasn't helped, but there is no one-size-fits-all approach to filling jobs — that's why Gov. Evers is working with local leaders to create common sense solutions.

In southeast Wisconsin, Madison College is utilizing Gov. Evers' investment to break barriers by expanding access, raising capacity, and improving the quality of child care programs. Gov. Evers' investment is also helping train new workers so they can quickly fill job openings in the manufacturing industry.

Read more below about how Gov. Evers is making child care more affordable and filling job openings.

Cap Times: [With \\$2.9 million, Madison College aims to break barriers to child care](#)

Madison College serves students in 12 counties through its three Madison campuses and regional campuses in Fort Atkinson, Portage, Reedsburg and Watertown. But only students at the Truax campus in Madison have access to on-campus child care.

That center, called the Early Learning Campus, can accommodate just 50 children, and there are regularly more babies on the waiting list than enrolled.

That leaves many students to look for child care on their own in a state where child care costs more than college tuition and some parents reserve child care slots before they're pregnant. Such challenges can lead parents — and especially mothers — to put careers and school on hold.

Now, the college has millions of dollars to put toward solutions, both for its students and staff, and for the wider communities it serves.

In December, the college was selected as one of 12 recipients of a Workforce Innovation Grant administered by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and the state's Department of Workforce Development for its proposal to spend \$2.9 million to address child care challenges and also train manufacturing workers.

The grants, aimed at finding long-term solutions to the state's workforce challenges, come from federal pandemic relief funds provided through the American Rescue Plan Act. A second round of grants is expected to be awarded later this year.

A 'road map' to child care access

With the funds, Madison College has hired a staff member tasked with helping student parents navigate the sometimes-overwhelming child care system. Now the college is studying each of the communities where it operates to learn what child care services exist and what makes them hard to access.

The barriers could be different in every community, said Donna Jost, director of the Early Learning Campus and one of the leaders of the grant project. "Is it location? Is it the hours of care? Is it the cost of care?"

By March, the college plans to have created a "road map" from which it can determine how to best use the grant funds to address those challenges. That might mean creating one or more additional child care centers of its own; partnering with local businesses to create additional child care options; or referring students, staff and community members to existing child care providers, Jost said.

The college also plans to use education to raise the capacity and quality of the region's child care. The industry has long struggled to attract and retain workers, in

part because the average pay in Wisconsin is just \$10 to \$13 an hour. The pandemic has only exacerbated the hiring challenge, as some people sit out the job market to care for children or relatives, and fierce competition among employers drives up wages.

Madison College hopes to draw more workers into the field through a series of training pathways that build on each other, allowing students to enter the field quickly and continue their education when they're ready. And it wants to make it easier for existing child care workers to go back to school.

Research shows that child care workers who receive further education are better prepared to deal with the challenges they encounter in their jobs, Jost said. That not only improves outcomes for children, but it also makes child care workers feel more successful, and that makes them less likely to quit.

"People have more tools to care for and nurture and educate the children in their care, so they're not so burned out," Jost said.

Currently, the college offers early childhood education classes online and at its Goodman South campus. To expand access, they'll consider whether to begin offering in-person classes at other campuses, and they'll offer a limited number of scholarships.

But it's not easy to convince child care workers to go back to school, said Crystal Ranson. Before becoming the preschool program director for Red Caboose Child Care Center in Madison, Ranson spent eight years earning her associate's degree while working as an assistant teacher for 2-year-olds. At a roundtable discussion about the grant at the college's Goodman South campus on Tuesday, she said she'd like to see more of her staff continue their education, but they're overworked as it is.

"For them, to go back to school after working 10-hour days is always kind of a struggle," Ranson said.

Madison College isn't the only grant recipient that plans to use its funds to solve child care challenges; other winning proposals include plans to expand child care in Green County and Door County. Missy Hughes, secretary of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, guesses that at least 25% of the more than 120 applications submitted involved child care.

The child care business model is “really unsustainable,” Hughes said at the roundtable, calling on everyone from business owners to bankers to work on fixing it.

[...]

Rapid training for manufacturing workers

The college also plans to use a portion of the grant funds to train workers for another industry strapped for workers locally: manufacturing.

“We’re hearing from the manufacturing sector, almost on a daily basis: ‘We have jobs to fill. We need people on the production floor,’” Brian Woodhouse, vice president of industry and regional affairs for Madison College, said at the roundtable.

The college plans to offer 60- to 80-hour training courses designed to get workers ready for factory jobs within weeks. Workers who complete the initial training may choose to take manufacturing jobs right away, stay in school to earn a degree, or return to school after working in the industry.