

Gov. Evers: Evers, Evers administration continue to do what's best for kids through 'Get Kids Ready' school readiness program

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Governor announces nearly 1,400 care providers intend to participate in Wisconsin's first-ever entirely state-funded child care program to help as many as 24,000 kids get ready for Kindergarten

MADISON — Gov. Evers tonight, during his 2026 State of the State address, announced that following the [launch](#) of the state's first-ever entirely state-funded child care program, "Get Kids Ready," earlier this year, nearly 1,400 licensed and certified child care providers have expressed interest in participating in the inaugural year of the program, representing a cohort with the potential to provide school readiness programming to approximately 24,000 kids during the 2026-27 school year.

This investment was made possible through the more than \$360 million investment that Gov. Evers fought for and secured in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to help stabilize Wisconsin's child care industry,

bolster child care providers, and lower the cost of child care for working families. Through this \$65 million program, qualified child care providers will focus on developing the academic, physical, social-emotional, and self-help skills that kids need to succeed in school, and in return, the state will pay child care providers directly for the time kids spend in Get Kids Ready programming, making that part of the day free for families. The new, first-of-its-kind program in Wisconsin is designed to help ensure the state's child

care industry will receive sustainable, ongoing state investments into the future.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF), of the roughly 4,700 regulated child care providers across Wisconsin, 40 percent of group providers, 25 percent of family providers, and 20 percent of certified providers intend to participate. The strong interest from providers across the state both underscores the need for a direct investment program and reflects the fields' enthusiasm for supporting young kids on their path to school readiness.

Relevant excerpts from Gov. Evers' 2026 State of the State address are available below:

"...Folks, we've gotten a lot done for Wisconsin over the last seven years. Our work during the Year of the Kid is another good example. From teaching science in Baraboo to getting the scoop from students on smoker's corner as a principal in Tomah to the decade I spent as state superintendent to becoming your governor, I've devoted most of my life to doing what's best for our kids. After watching a

Republican governor and Legislature shred my education budgets as state superintendent, I knew we could do more and better for our kids. Our kids are why I got into this gig in the first place.

"So, while every year is the Year of the Kid for me, I declared 2025 the official Year of the Kid and introduced the most pro-kid budget in state history. And then we went to work.

"When it comes to doing what's best for our kids, we have to start early. A top priority for me during the Year of the Kid was to lower the cost of child care so more kids and families can access early childhood education. Getting direct support to child care providers in our state budget was a bright-line issue for me in negotiations with Republican leaders. I fought hard to make sure our pro-kid budget included \$360 million to support our child care industry and working families, more than one-third of which will go directly to providers to support care for nearly 170,000 kids.

“We also created our state’s first-ever fully state-funded child care program called “Get Kids Ready.” Get Kids Ready is a new, first-of-its-kind program in Wisconsin to help give four-year-olds a boost getting ready for Kindergarten. Here’s how it works: qualifying child care providers will focus on making sure kids have the academic, physical, and social-emotional skills that kids need to be successful at school. And, in return, the state pays child care providers directly for the time kids spend in Get Kids Ready programming, making that part of the day free for families. This is a big deal for Wisconsin’s kids and our future.

And I’m excited to announce tonight that nearly 1,400 providers have signaled they are ready to be a part of this program, an effort that is projected to help as many as 24,000 kids across Wisconsin get a head start on their education in just the first year..... ”

Families with children who will be four years old on or before Sept. 1, 2026, and are interested in having their child participate in Get Kids Ready, are encouraged to visit DCF’s Get Kids Ready Participating Programs [webpage](#) to find programs in their area.

GOV. EVERS’ EFFORTS TO STABILIZE WISCONSIN’S CHILD CARE INDUSTRY, BOLSTER

PROVIDERS, AND LOWER CHILD CARE COSTS FOR WORKING FAMILIES

According to a 2025 [survey](#), 90 percent of Wisconsinites, including those without kids, say finding affordable, high-quality child care in Wisconsin is a problem, and over three-quarters of Wisconsinites support an increase in state funding to fix it. In response to this critical issue, Gov. Evers has made

investing in the state’s child care industry to help fill available child care slots, cut child care wait lists, and lower the cost of care for working families a top priority of his administration. After months of negotiations with legislative leaders, Gov. Evers [secured](#) a more than \$360 million investment in child care in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget, including delivering on the governor’s promise to secure direct payments for child care providers—a bright line the governor previously signaled would force

him to veto the budget if Republicans failed to pass a budget without it.

Soon after Gov. Evers signed the 2025-27 Biennial Budget in July, the governor and his administration worked quickly to [launch](#) the Child Care Bridge Payment Program, which provides \$110 million in monthly direct payments to Wisconsin child care providers through June 2026. The Child Care Bridge Payments Program is similar to the wildly successful Child Care Counts Program, which was launched by Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration in 2020 and that helped more than 5,700 child care providers keep their doors open, ensuring the employment of more than 75,000 child care professionals, and allowing providers to continue care for more than 430,000 kids. The Child Care Bridge Payments Program provides the financial stability providers need to stay open, to recruit and retain qualified staff, and to continue providing high-

quality care for Wisconsin's kids. The quick work of the Evers Administration and DCF ensured there were no gaps in direct funding for child care providers caused by the winding down of the Child Care Counts

Program. In 2025, Child Care Bridge Payment ensured employment of nearly 34,000 child care professionals and allowed providers to continue care for more than 177,000 kids through over \$54 million in direct payments to providers.

Additionally, thanks to the governor's \$123 million budget investment to increase rates under the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program to help lower out-of-pocket child care costs for working families across the state, Gov. Evers, together with DCF, [announced](#) in October that Wisconsin Shares families will see an increase in their subsidy amount. With this investment, the maximum Wisconsin Shares subsidy rate will be at or above the price of 75 percent of child care slots. The increase impacted roughly 15,000 Wisconsin Shares families, with the average savings per family being around \$174 per month.

In addition to the \$65 million to fund the "Get Kids Ready" initiative, as well as the \$110 million investment in direct payments to child care providers and \$123 million in the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program, the governor's budget also includes:

- \$2 million intended to help bolster Wisconsin's Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which help parents find child care locally and provide training and technical assistance opportunities to child care providers;

- \$28.5 million for a pilot program to help support expanding capacity across Wisconsin's child care industry to ensure more families with infants and toddlers can access quality, affordable child care; and
 - The proposal will increase payments to providers caring for infants and toddlers across the state through the Wisconsin Shares program.
 - Under the plan, providers would receive payments of \$200 per month for every infant under 18 months and \$100 per month for every toddler between 18 months and 30 months.
- \$2 million to Wonderschool designed to help child care providers across the state build capacity to be able to cut child care wait lists and ensure more kids and families have access to affordable child care.
 - The grant will expand access to high-quality child care in the state, including launching an online software platform that is linked to the department's website to connect child care providers with child care workers.

More information about the bipartisan pro-kid budget signed by Gov. Evers is available [here](#). More information on Gov. Evers' efforts to do what's best for kids in 2025 the Year of the Kid is available [here](#).