



Childcare Career Guide

**How to build a career
as an early childhood
educator — and keep
that momentum going.**

There's no better feeling than helping a young one learn.

Those moments when you see a switch flip and a light go on. A baby points, a toddler recognizes a shape, a preschooler makes a learning leap. **It's moments like this that make the steady career path of early childhood education even more rewarding.**

If you're considering a career in early childhood education, or if you're already working in the field but want to advance, we've pulled together information and resources to help you see steps forward, as well as support to keep you moving.

Why become an early childhood educator?

Early childhood educators benefit from:

- › Meaningful work that makes a positive effect in children's lives
- › An in-demand career path with opportunities for creativity and growth
- › Steady employment in a rewarding industry
- › The opportunity to support children and families, and in turn, entire communities
- › An active, busy workday (it's not a desk job!)
- › The joy of working with children

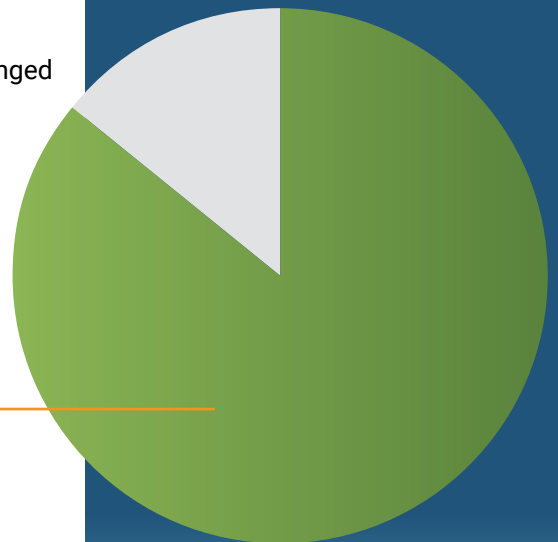
Why is the demand for childcare workers so high?



86% of working parents are challenged at work due to childcare issues. As a result, the need for accessible childcare — and caring, talented people to provide that care — continues to grow.*

86%

[*raisingwisconsin.org/economic-impact](https://raisingwisconsin.org/economic-impact)



Wondering if early childhood education is right for you?

If you love kids and are energized by spending time with them, working in an early education program might be a good fit for you. **Consider these questions:**

How does childcare provide steady, in-demand work?

Early childhood education fills an important need for many families, and offers individuals steady employment. In fact, more than half of Wisconsin childcare providers have unfilled spots on their staff.*

How can you help children develop?

This career lets you play an important role in shaping children's physical, mental, social, and emotional development.

Is there a job where no two days are the same?

Working with kids offers the challenge of using your knowledge and emotional intelligence to provide child-specific support and teaching.

How can you grow your career with the support of a team?

If you are a people-person, you may enjoy the team effort of early childhood education as well the opportunity to step into a leadership role.

How can you experience and learn from each kid's and family's differences?

Part of the appeal of childcare is being able to see individual children and families as unique, with their own strengths, challenges, and approaches to learning.

What can you do to help kids learn?

If you're curious about how child development and the learning process can be nurtured, an early learning setting can be a fascinating daily experience.

Do you want work that really matters?

Early childhood educators support parents and families, making a difference across the community.

*Wisconsin Public Radio. "Survey: Demand for child care outpaces providers' capacity." [wpr.org/news/survey-demand-for-child-care-outpaces-providers-capacity](https://www.wpr.org/news/survey-demand-for-child-care-outpaces-providers-capacity). Accessed September 2025.



Early childhood education: Career paths and growth opportunities

Just like any career path, there are a variety of ways for early childhood education workers to advance in responsibilities and pay. Here's an initial look at roles and future possibilities.

Job Title	Responsibilities	Education/Credentials	Average Pay
Childcare Educator	› Work in full-day and part-day childcare programs or nursery schools › Develop and deliver interactive lesson plans › Establish and enforce behavior rules in the classroom	High school diploma Some centers require a specific certification like the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or even a bachelor's degree in education. Look for programs such as a Basic Early Childhood Educator or Childcare Services technical diploma or associate degree.	\$34,670 a year
Family Childcare Provider	› Provide care for children in your own home › Ensure physical, emotional, and social well-being while fostering development › Prepare meals and snacks	High school diploma	\$30,190 a year

Job Title	Responsibilities	Education/Credentials	Average Pay
Group Childcare Center Director/Administrator	› Responsible for management and operation of facilities › Develop with teachers a safe and stimulating environment › Manage staff and finance › Ensure compliance with regulations	Bachelor's or associate degree and at least five years of experience, or seek out an Early Childhood Education Administrator certificate or program.	\$54,420 a year
Curriculum Coordinator	› Assist with lesson plan creation and implementation at childcare centers or schools › Offer classroom teacher mentoring and support › Assist teachers with child observations and individualizing lesson plans to meet each child's needs.	Bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field, and a master's degree, preferably in education or curriculum and instruction	\$87,060 a year

Data Source: Bureau of Workforce Information and Technical Support (BWITS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/oes.htm

“The grant funding helped me to be able to open up my own business, while allowing me to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in my community.”

- Miranda Otba
Owner of Little Smiles Childcare in Wausau

“This program didn’t just support my growth—it ignited it. To anyone considering this program—do it. This support gave me more than funding. It gave me momentum, clarity, and the chance to grow something beautiful.”

- Monica Halopka
CEO of Huey’s Hideaway Children’s Museum in Medford

Just getting started, and wondering what to do next?

Where to begin

The first step into early childhood education is as an assistant teacher or teacher. In Wisconsin, the requirements can vary depending on the school or program you are interested in. Start at the [Wisconsin Registry](#) website to learn more about the different credentials available. You can also check out the [Job Center of Wisconsin](#) for training opportunities specific to your childcare career goals.

Evaluate your path forward

There are a few different ways to step into a childcare career. One way to build skills and experience at the same time is through apprenticeships. Visit the [Wisconsin Apprenticeship page](#) through the Department of Workforce Development to learn about [Youth Apprenticeship or Registered Apprenticeship](#) programs in early childhood education, including reimbursement opportunities for both you and the childcare provider you would work with.

While some organizations and programs require a bachelor's degree in education, many allow a state-approved [teacher preparation program](#) such as a technical diploma. At the least, look for programs that offer Introduction to the Childcare Profession, Fundamentals of Family Childcare or Principles of Childcare Certification as a starting point.

Explore support and resources

[T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Wisconsin](#) offers scholarships to early childhood educators.



Already in the early childhood education field, and want to take the next step?

Where to start

Elevating your skills and education is a great way to build experience — as well as your salary level and job opportunities. Talk to people in the positions you're interested in to learn more about their career paths, and start setting achievable goals that move you forward. You can also check out the [Job Center of Wisconsin](#) for training opportunities specific to your childcare career goals.

Evaluate your education path

Apprenticeships offer a way to build skills and experience at the same time. Visit the [Wisconsin Apprenticeship page](#) through the Department of Workforce Development to learn about [Youth Apprenticeship or Registered Apprenticeship](#) programs in early childhood education.

[Wisconsin Registry](#) offers key information for individuals at every stage of their careers, including possible educational paths (both degree and non-degree) to expand job possibilities.

Explore support and resources

Start by looking at [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Wisconsin](#), which offers scholarships to early childhood educators.



Curious about owning your own childcare business?

Owning your own group childcare center, family childcare business, or day camp lets you combine a career you enjoy with a small business owner's control over schedule and workload. There are many details involved in owning your own business, but there are also resources to help you get started, as small childcare businesses are important to Wisconsin's economy.

Where to start

The state of Wisconsin offers resources to help [childcare business owners](#) prepare for success.

[Wisconsin Fast Forward Grants](#) also provide a way to offset your costs in training educators to work at your business.

Evaluate your education path

While the education path can be less traditional for business owners than for teachers or administrators, you will still want to have similar coursework to senior-level teachers so that you're prepared to create curriculum and be aware of developmental needs and opportunities.



Explore support and resources

A wide variety of support and information is available online specific to starting and running a childcare business. Check out these websites, as well as the resources in the appendix:

Job Center of Wisconsin Business Services

jobcenterofwisconsin.com

Wisconomy

jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/providers

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

wisconsinearlychildhood.org/programs/weesn

Wisconsin Fast Forward

wisconsinfastforward.com

Want to strengthen or expand your current childcare business?

Running a childcare business is equal parts rewarding and challenging. If you already have your business up and running, there are resources and programs in place to help early childhood education providers grow and thrive.

Where to start

Consider opportunities for [strengthening your business](#), such as hiring employees to increase capacity or evaluating whether a business loan for remodeling or relocating would allow your business to take a more ambitious path.

Evaluate your path forward

As you consider growing your business, different knowledge and skills beyond education could help you achieve your goals. Explore business and administration classes within early childhood education [degree programs](#) at a school near you.

As your childcare business expands, you'll need employees to increase capacity. The [Job Center of Wisconsin](#) offers a way to post job openings and review the resumes of qualified job-seekers.

Build opportunity out of areas of need

The high demand for childcare means that there are opportunities ahead for savvy businesspeople. One possibility is to evaluate local needs: For instance, if you are in a neighborhood that has many school-aged children, could you add an after-school program to your service offerings? If a local business has a second shift, would it be possible to partner with them to offer evening or overnight resources? See more areas of possible [childcare needs](#).

Explore support and resources

Information is available online to help fuel the growth of your childcare business. Check out these websites, as well as the resources in the appendix:

Job Center of Wisconsin Business Services

jobcenterofwisconsin.com

Wisconomy

jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

wisconsinearlychildhood.org

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association Business Resources

wisconsinearlychildhood.org/child-care-business-resources

Wisconsin Fast Forward

wisconsinfastforward.com

Wisconsin Registry Resource Center

wiregistry.org/programs-organizations/resource-center

Helpful Resources

Job Center of Wisconsin

jobcenterofwisconsin.com

A free online resource connecting job seekers with career advancement opportunities by searching for trainings, apprenticeships, and jobs by occupation, wage, and education level.

Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners

collaboratingpartners.com

A cooperative effort between multiple state agencies and a diverse group of early childhood partners to strengthen childcare and education throughout Wisconsin.

Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies

thrivingwi.org/find-your-local-ccrr-and-frc

Your local CCR&R can provide a range of services for care providers including assistance around childcare topics and business practices.

Thriving Wisconsin

thrivingwi.org

Wisconsin's statewide member association for childcare organizations and individuals.

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

dcf.wisconsin.gov

A trusted resource for information on childcare licensing, funding opportunities, and professional development.