

Early Care & Education in the Fox Valley

May 2023

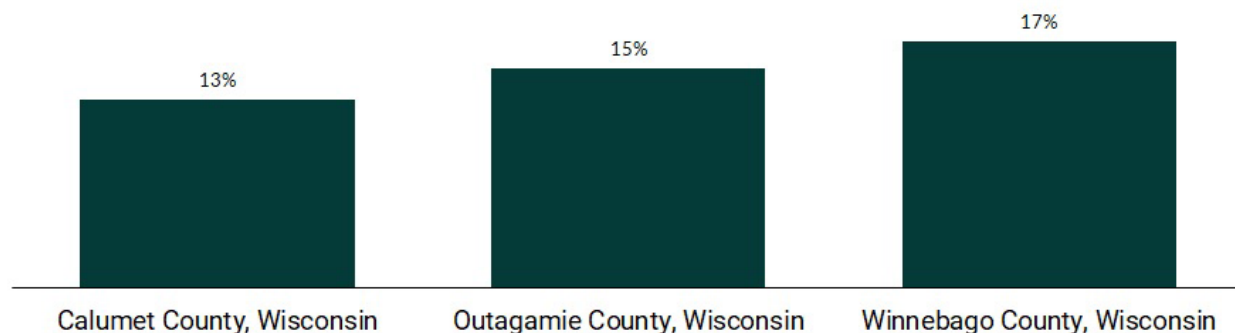
Every child deserves a solid foundation in life, regardless of income. Affordable and accessible early care and education ensures that parents can get to work and sets children up for a strong start. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how child care is critical for children and families and why early care and education providers are an essential part of our local communities and a thriving economy.

Even prior to the pandemic, child care programs were operating on thin financial margins—struggling to cover the cost of doing business while keeping their tuition at a level that families could afford. This sector of the economy was also hit hard by the rising cost of doing business. Without federal stabilization dollars, many programs would have shut down. Even so, three years after the start of the pandemic, employment in the Wisconsin child care industry is still below pre-pandemic levels. Today, 22% of the Fox Valley is considered a child care desert, which is an area with little or no access to quality care. Families in Outagamie county experience the greatest impact—36% of the county is without an adequate supply of child care.

Even when Fox Valley families can find a space for their children in a program, they may be unable to access care because it is unaffordable.¹ Child care is considered unaffordable if families are paying more than 7% of their income.² But for many families in the Fox Valley, and particularly families of color, the cost of care far exceeds that threshold.

Child Care Affordability for Fox Valley Families

Annual Child Care Cost for an Infant as a Percentage of Median Family Income



Source: Kids Forward analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey and Child Care Resource and Referral

Notes: Child care costs reflect full-time Care at a licensed group provider

A strong early care and education system is a win for all children and families in the Fox Valley and across Wisconsin. But the shortage of child care is keeping many parents at home to care for their children, which contributes to the worker shortage in our state. Lack of affordable child care means children, families, and businesses suffer.

Access to Quality Care

The Governor's 2023 budget proposes to increase access to quality, affordable child care by investing \$300 million to fund the Child Care Counts program. This helps providers stay in operation, pay their workers fair wages, and provide high-quality care. If legislators approve, these changes would improve the well-being of our young children, reduce racial disparities, help parents participate in the workforce, and boost Wisconsin's long-term prosperity.

Take Action

Contact your legislators and let them know that Wisconsin's children & families deserve better:

1. Find your representatives: maps.legis.wisconsin.gov
2. Use our budget analyses here to help inform your comments: kidsforward.org/category/tax-issues/
3. Sharing your personal experiences in your own voice is incredibly powerful.
4. To learn more about how to advocate for more equitable education policies in Wisconsin, read [Standing up for Racial Justice: A Starter Guide on Policy and Advocacy in Wisconsin: kidsforward.org/standing-up-for-racial-justice/](https://kidsforward.org/standing-up-for-racial-justice/).

View the Starter Guide in English, Spanish, or Hmong here:



Community Resources

- [Child Care Resource and Referral: ccrrfoxvalley.org](https://ccrrfoxvalley.org)
- [First Five Fox Valley: firstfivefoxvalley.org](https://firstfivefoxvalley.org)
- [Stronger Together Fox Valley-Good Early Start Team: wisconsinpartners.org/stronger-together-fox-valley](https://wisconsinpartners.org/stronger-together-fox-valley)

Contact

Amanda Martinez, amartinez@kidsforward.org

About Kids Forward

Kids Forward inspires action and promotes access to opportunity for every kid, every family, and every community in Wisconsin, notably children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. We envision a Wisconsin where every child thrives. Using a research- and community-informed approach, we advocate for effective, long-lasting solutions that break down barriers to success for children and families. Visit us at KidsForward.org.

¹ Families in the Fox Valley also struggle to find care because the operating hours don't align with parents' work schedules or the programs don't offer care that affirms families' language, traditions, or culture. (Gallagher, Helmenstine, Lawrence, & Sucsy, 2020)
² <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>