

WISCONSIN EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION SCAN

Executive Summary

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**Linda Tuchman-Ginsberg, PhD
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Waisman Center
Pamla J. Boulton, EdD
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

Wisconsin Early Childhood Higher Education Scan

Schools, colleges and departments of education in institutions of higher education are increasingly aware of and responding to the growing needs of Wisconsin's early childhood workforce. Substantial progress has been made over the last few years, including numerous innovative approaches for helping child care and Head Start staff obtain a bachelor's degree.

This report highlights former and current initiatives; describes existing and promising pathways to higher education; identifies support systems for students; and offers recommendations for continuous improvement in the state's early childhood professional development system. The Wisconsin Early Childhood Higher Education Scan was conducted under the auspices of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council to identify and document Wisconsin's early childhood higher education system. The Scan provides a robust snapshot of programs and opportunities within the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), UW System campuses, the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), The College of the Menomonee Nation (CMN), and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Alternative Licensing Programs to promote and assist early childhood professionals in obtaining higher education degrees, teacher licenses from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and other early childhood credentials.

Major Findings

- Statewide, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) offer a variety of entry points and pathways to higher education degrees in early childhood and related domains. Most IHE programs offer alternatives to in class / face-to-face coursework.
- Within existing IHE, a variety of innovative programs and practices have been or are being developed to address the needs of Wisconsin's early childhood workforce.

- Wisconsin has an excellent Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in Early Childhood Education, including supports for a variety of adult learners and pathways to a four-year degree.
- The UW-System, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), College of the Menominee Nation (CMN) and Alternative DPI licensing programs indicate that there are programs with early childhood cohorts, relevant early childhood content and field work placements. In addition, the IHE system offers supports and resources to individual students. A number of UW-System schools offer accelerated licensure programs for students entering with a Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Associates Degree (e.g., UW-Oshkosh, UW-Whitewater).
- The reported use by survey respondents of early childhood curricula (e.g., Model Early Learning Standards, Family Partnerships, Early Identification / Screening, Pyramid Model) suggests that there are opportunities for cross-sector collaboration with IHE for early childhood professional development.
- Numerous resources are available to support to adult learners within the child care and Head Start community to pursue higher education degrees, including articulation agreements, credit for prior learning, professional counseling / support and courses that bridge the WTCS IHE with four-year degree programs.
- Data from the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) demonstrates the impact of the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Program. The Registry data tracks professional development and degree / licensure status of the child care work force.
- WECA's website has the capacity to be a central point of information for the array of IHE experiences and pathways available to early childhood professionals.
- Committed faculty and staff within Wisconsin's IHE are developing innovative programs to meet the learning needs of the early care and education workforce.

- Recent innovations include new early childhood degree / teacher preparation programs, e.g., offering Registry Credentials for credit, accepting Registry Credential credit-based coursework in degree programs, holding courses on-site where providers work and increasing one-year diplomas as a port of entry to a higher education degree.

Addressing the Gaps in Early Childhood Higher Education Personnel Preparation

The following recommendations are offered to continue the innovations and progress that has been made over the last decade to ensure that individuals working with young children and their families have sufficient, easily accessible opportunities for professional development.

Cross-Sector System Development

- ✓ Within the Professional Development Initiative, continue to include IHE priorities and activities to address early childhood higher education.
- ✓ Consider opportunities within the current statewide higher education personnel preparation initiatives (e.g., Teacher Performance Assessment) to focus on outcomes of early childhood personnel preparation programs.
- ✓ Create opportunities to further evaluate and study the contributions of higher education to teacher effectiveness.

Access to Higher Education Programs

- ✓ Increase awareness among the early childhood workforce of all of the IHE opportunities available in Wisconsin.
- ✓ Promote and support innovative approaches for more options to accommodate full time employees, especially related to fieldwork.
- ✓ Reduce barriers to attending classes on campus by offering more on-site course work within community sites (e.g., child care centers).
- ✓ Continue to develop articulation agreements and support the WECA initiative to develop a centralized location to improve access to information for potential adult learners / students.

- ✓ Preserve T.E.A.C.H. funding and explore additional financial resources to assist with higher education tuition (e.g., low interest student loans, loan forgiveness, refinancing of student loans, scholarships) for early childhood professionals.
- ✓ Continue to develop aggregated data from T.E.A.C.H., The Registry, DPI and other sources to use in developing additional programs and pathways.

Early Childhood Content and Fieldwork

- ✓ Increase curriculum content and field work in the following areas:
 - Infant/Toddler (children 3 and under)
 - Special Needs/Disabilities
 - Dual Language Learners
 - Promoting Healthy Social Emotional Development
 - Addressing Behavioral Challenges
- ✓ Increase utilization of early childhood community placements for field work.

Supports to Individual Adult Learners

- ✓ Continue to support and expand funding for IHE degrees, including T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships and professional counseling to support the workforce.
- ✓ Continue to support Credit for Prior Learning Initiatives.
- ✓ Continue to increase linkages between degree and continuing education programs, especially related to the Registry Credentials and other credit-based IHE-sponsored programs.
- ✓ Address literacy and language challenges that present barriers for some adult learners.
- ✓ Help individual adult learners understand the IHE resources available within each campus or program.

The full report is available at: <http://www.dcf.wi.gov/ecac/meetings.htm>

