

# Together, we can build a stronger Portage County

Portage County FORWARD: Early Learning & Care Coalition was created to positively reshape the child care landscape in Portage County resulting in better outcomes for all.

## Our goals are ambitious yet achievable with your help:

- Increase accessibility to quality child care for all families
- Boost affordability through innovative funding models
- Enhance care quality by financially supporting providers
- Engage businesses in child care-friendly practices
- Drive economic growth through improved workforce participation
- Build community-wide collaboration and support for child care

Join us in this initiative—together, we will build a brighter future for our children, businesses, and community.

## Here's how you can get involved:



### For Businesses:

- Offer child care benefits
- Implement flexible work policies
- Join the Portage County FORWARD: Early Learning & Care Coalition



### For Families:

- Share your child care experiences and needs with your employer
- Advocate for child care policies with local officials
- Join the Portage County FORWARD: Early Learning & Care Coalition



### For Child care Providers:

- Collaborate with local businesses to meet diverse child care needs
- Advocate for policies that support sustainable child care operations
- Join the Portage County FORWARD: Early Learning & Care Coalition for support

## Get involved today!

Email: [info@childcaring.org](mailto:info@childcaring.org)

Phone: 1-800-628-8534

*“Early childhood care and education is vital as it lays the foundation for the continued development of our children — the workforce of the future. Together we can meet this critical need.”*

**Doug Ballweg**  
President & CEO,  
Delta Dental of Wisconsin

## Coalition Members:

**April Hartjes**, Mid-State Technical College  
**April Niemi**, CAP Services Inc.  
**Becky Helf**, UW-Stevens Point Learning and Care Center  
**Christina Lorge**, Mid-State Technical College  
**Beth Smith**, United Way of Portage County  
**Jennifer Kleiner**, Canaland Christian Academy of Early Learning  
**Jodi Becker**, Almond Bancroft Schools  
**Kelly Borchardt**, Childcaring Inc.  
**Lori Shafranski**, Childcaring Inc.  
**Mae Nachman**, United Way of Portage County  
**Maria Coakley**, Children's Wisconsin  
**Marlee Samuels**, Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin  
**Mary Olson**, Little Sneakers Family Day Care  
**Michael Witte**, Portage County Business Council  
**Paula Erickson**, Delta Dental of WI  
**Rob Manzke**, UW- Stevens Point  
**Ryan Zietlow**, Stevens Point Area YMCA  
**Sherrie Stanczyk**, Stevens Point Area Public School District  
**Sue Matis**, Skyward, Inc.  
**Webster Francois**, Marshfield Clinic Medical Center

# Portage County FORWARD:

## Early Learning & Care Coalition

By investing in early education, you're investing in the future of Portage County.

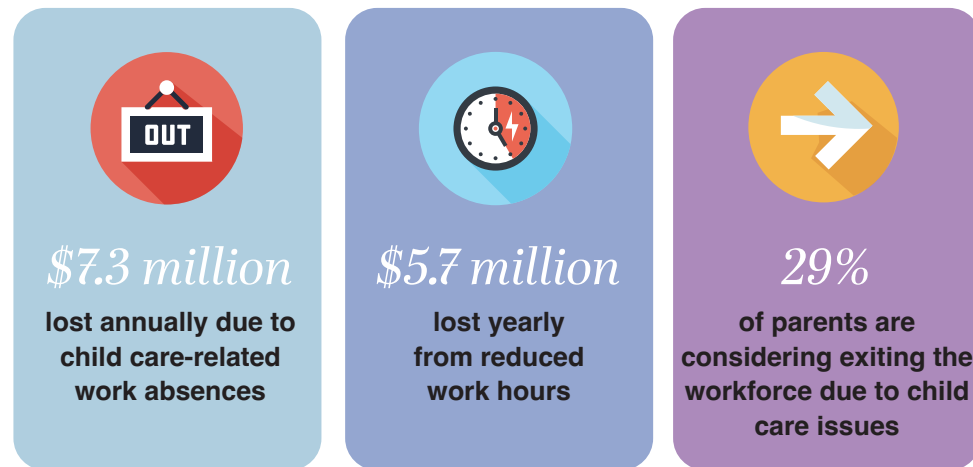
Your support will impact every business, employer, family, and our larger community.

# The hidden costs of our child care crisis

We're facing a challenge that threatens the foundation of our economic wellbeing: the child care crisis. This isn't just a problem for parents—it's also impacting businesses, employers, and residents in our community.

These hidden costs are impacting Portage County and causing our communities to fall behind.

## HIDDEN COSTS:



Source: UW-River Falls Research, 2024

These numbers paint a clear picture: without adequate child care resources, our workforce shrinks, productivity declines, and our growth stagnates.



## But there's hope.

By recognizing child care as an economic driver, we can transform the future of not only our children but also our county.

Investing in early child care education isn't just the right thing for families—it's a smart business strategy for building a stronger, more resilient Portage County.



## Investing in early childhood education: stronger businesses, stronger communities

Over 90% of businesses agree that improved early education access enhances their ability to attract and retain top talent. That's a clear indicator of early education's impact on workforce stability.

Quality child care enables employees to focus on their work, thus reducing stress and improving job satisfaction. This results in increased productivity, lower turnover rates, and a more profitable business.

### Here are ways businesses can become more supportive:

- Implement family-friendly work policies
- Offer child care stipends or reimbursements
- Advocate with local government to support child care funding

However, the child care crisis is too complex for any one business to solve alone.

## We must work together to solve it.

By investing in early childhood learning and supporting the Portage County FORWARD: Early Learning & Care Coalition, you're strengthening our community and making an investment in the future of your business.

*"Affordable, high-quality child care is essential to the future of Portage County businesses. Creating a more effective child care approach today will ensure a thriving and sustainable community for future generations."*

**Ray Ackerlund**  
President, Skyward, Inc.