

NEWS RELEASE
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Early Education Wage Initiative Aims to Strengthen Region's Early Childhood Workforce

NORTHWEST LOWER, MI – Hundreds of early educators in Northwest Michigan will soon get a bump in wages thanks to the *Early Education Wage Initiative*, which was launched Thursday, November 20th by the **Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition**, convened by **Networks Northwest**.

Beginning in January 2026, eligible early childhood educators will receive monthly stipends of \$200 (part-time) or \$300 (full-time) through August 2027. Based on current projections, Networks Northwest estimates being able to issue stipends to 189 full-time educators and 55 part-time educators.

The Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) received \$30 million in state school aid funds to strengthen the early childhood workforce, of which \$16 million supports the Wage Initiative through Michigan's 10 Regional Child Care Coalitions. The Gogebic-Ontonagon Intermediate School District serves as the fiscal agent, partnering with MiLEAP to administer the program statewide.

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The Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition (NW RCCCC) works to unite families, providers, employers and community partners to identify challenges and create practical, community-based solutions that ensure all children have access to quality care. The Early Education Wage Initiative is one of the strategies the NW RCCC is implementing to address early childhood workforce challenges.

The Wage Initiative aims to:

- Attract, retain and stabilize the workforce of early childhood educators by providing direct, predictable wage support to give families consistent access to reliable, high-quality care.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships by encouraging local businesses, charities and community partners to co-invest in the early childhood workforce.
- Generate data and insights to guide future wage and workforce policy, ensuring Michigan can continue building a competitive, high-quality early learning system.
- Elevate early childhood education as a respected, sustainable career path for emerging professionals.

The Wage Initiative will test and evaluate how increased wages influence retention, workforce stability and well-being, while also identifying sustainable funding models that can continue beyond the initial investment.

Reflecting on the Wage Initiative launch, Jennifer Wixson, Early Childhood Education Professor and Program Coordinator at North Central Michigan College said, "I'm excited to see this Wage Initiative launched in our region. When early childhood educators can earn a fair and sustainable wage, families benefit, businesses thrive, and our overall workforce becomes stronger. This effort is an important step toward a long-term strategy to improve and support Michigan's early education profession."

Brigid Wilson, Manager of Children's Educational Services for Munson Healthcare emphasized the important role early childhood educators play when she said, "I believe

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relationship building is the most important skill to learn and grow in life, and especially as an adult in the business world. Forming relationships with early childhood educators is crucial to help children begin to build trust. This grant opportunity will allow early childhood educators the ability to stay in the field, and continue to build crucial relationships with children, without any disruption in bonding - which we know is crucial to development in infants and young children.”

Eligible early childhood educators include teachers and assistant teachers working in licensed child care programs (including centers, family and group child care homes, Head Start programs and Great Start Readiness Programs) as well as child care business owner-operators who both operate businesses and provide care to children. Child care providers (including centers, family and group homes, Head Start programs and Great Start Readiness Programs) can seek more information and apply for the program by visiting www.nwm.org/childcarewages.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by emailing Dana O'Dell at dana.odell@networksnorthwest.org and stating preferences for resolution, file format, and file size. Or phone (231) 929-5075. Check our online Media Room at networksnorthwest.org/media

Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10-county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works!, APEX Accelerator (formerly PTAC), various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities' requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business, and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our website, networksnorthwest.org. Networks Northwest's member counties are Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.

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