



Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition | 14 Impactful Solutions

# Regional Child Care Plan

*“If the region wants to be desirable to young families there has to be a change.”*—LEELANAU COUNTY PARENT

## Solution 9

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL PLAN HERE](#)

# Introduction to the 14 Solutions

The following 14 Solutions arise from more than 100 distinct ideas generated by the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition

The following Child Care Solution module is one of 14 Solutions that comprise the Regional Child Care Plan of the Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Planning Coalition. The 49-member Coalition represents regional and community partners in the northwest-lower Michigan counties of Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee and Wexford.

*The work of the Coalition is funded by a Regional Child Care Planning grant awarded and supported by Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) Child Care Innovation Fund in order to understand and address the child care crisis and to expand equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care for working families. Grants were issued to 16 regional coalitions covering every part of Michigan.*

*Regional Child Care Planning grants were issued to ECIC by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

## Each Solution Module:


### Meets several criteria:

- **Impactful** – in the opinion of the Coalition, directly addresses one or more of the Root Causes impacting the regional child care system and will improve access, affordability and/or quality.
- **Vetted** – have proven to be successful regionally or elsewhere
- **Sponsored** – one or more regional entities or groups is presently committed to or leading implementation

### Consists of five components::

- **Primary Root Cause** addressed
- **An introductory paragraph** summarizing the solution, why it can be beneficial and how it can be implemented
- **Background and Context** – relates why the solution may be needed or beneficial, along with some historical context where applicable
- **Examples and Priorities** – showcases examples of comparable approaches implemented within the region or elsewhere and then highlights implied priorities for implementation
- **Potential Near-Term Actions** – calls out near term actions that different groups of stakeholders can take in order to move toward implementation

## The 14 Solutions are:

1. State Investment
2. Local Public Funding
3. Policy Changes
4. Local Planning & Zoning
5. Provider Incubation
6. Community Facility Investments
7. Micro-Centers
8. Credential Pathways
9. **Substitute Pools** 
10. Universal Preschool
11. Home-Based Universal Preschool Option
12. Employer Policies & Actions
13. Enhanced Family Navigation
14. Peer-to-peer & Community Collaboration

# Substitute Pools

Expanding educator substitute pools—a substantial provider support

SOLUTION

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Substitutes allow child care centers and in-home providers to remain open when regular staff are absent due to illness, training, or personal leave, ensuring children continue to receive care without disruption. The region has some early-stage substitute pools in spots, but not enough to cover the need. Community organizations wishing to stabilize child care operations should expand available educator substitute pools.

## Background & Context

**Substitute educators are widely used across the K-12 education system. The presence of substitute teachers eases disruptions caused by teacher absences, allowing students to continue to receive instruction and support.**

In Michigan there are multiple substitute placement providers, such as Edustaff and WillSub, that hire substitute teachers and then contract with individual school districts to provide staffing as needed. These placement services manage all of the many safety and quality requirements that need to be met before a substitute can be entrusted with children (though substitutes do need to cover the costs of their own substitute permit and fingerprinting).

That well-developed system generally does not apply to child care educators. As a result few child care systems in Michigan are able to regularly take advantage of substitutes.

Why do these placement services companies not service child care? The answer is likely related to both the Broken Business Model and Workforce Gaps root causes. Because child care providers operate with such tight operating margins, there is little incentive for

the K-12 substitute companies to develop a staffing approach for child care. Child care substitutes need specialized training in early childhood education, CPR, health, and food handling. This can take about 42 hours of training, costing around \$1,000 per substitute.<sup>1</sup> Child care providers are willing to pay these costs for their own employees but not for a substitute who will float among multiple providers. The low wages and benefits that are typical of Michigan's current child care model make it even more challenging to recruit and retain substitutes compared to full time staff.

Despite these challenges, communities within Michigan and across the U.S. have been able to create viable substitute pools that provide essential support for child care providers while giving meaningful and viable work experiences for those who work as substitute child care educators.

**A stable and effective substitute system that supports the mixed-delivery child care system in the region would provide a number of benefits including:**

- Help child care providers maintain acceptable child-to-adult ratios

PRIMARY ROOT CAUSE  
ADDRESSED:

**Workforce  
Gaps**

<sup>1</sup> Child Caring Now, Substitute Pool action team internal analysis

*“Substitute pools that specifically benefit the child care sector generally require public or philanthropic investment. Local officials and funders wishing to substantially support child care providers should consider subsidizing new and existing substitute pools. The positive impact on the system will be significant.”*

- Child care providers shared stories of 1) having a sick educator 2) knowing that they would be “out of ratio” without this staff member and 3) needing to call families served by the child care provider to see who would be willing to have their children stay home
- This current disruption would be eliminated with a well-functioning substitute pool
- Allow educators to take time off for wellness, professional development or vacation
- Provide an opportunity for prospective educators and providers to “try out” the work and gain experience before taking other career path steps
- Provide a work opportunity for those who want a part-time or flexible schedule while working in the system
- Generally create more flexibility and adaptability within the system

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## Examples & Priorities

**States, communities, nonprofits, service providers and child care providers have worked together to create a range of viable child care educator substitute pools.**

### State-Backed Initiatives

Washington’s Early Care and Education Substitute Pool works to meet the need for child care substitutes by recruiting, training, and coordinating substitutes for licensed providers.<sup>2</sup> These efforts aim to create a more stable and sustainable child care system for providers, children, and families. All licensed providers are able to utilize the substitute pool. Those licensed providers who either 1) participate in child care scholarship programs or 2) use substitute hours in order to participate in state-sanctioned quality improvement are able to use substitutes at low or no cost. The Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families provides training, background checks, etc., at no cost to prospective substitutes, ensuring that the program is an attractive point of entry and workforce pipeline for people considering work in child care.

In September 2023, Wonderschool (an online business training and business support platform for child care providers) and the Mississippi Department of Human Services announced that they would be working to develop and implement a Statewide

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/substitute-pool>

Substitute Teacher Pool.<sup>3</sup> In the first four months after the program was launched, Wonderschool received applications from 3,500 individuals interested in working as child care substitutes and was able to supply more than 3,000 hours of substitute time.<sup>4</sup>

### Nonprofit and Community Initiatives

Some nonprofit and community initiatives have sought to be “matchmakers” between individuals willing to be substitutes and individual child care providers who can make use of substitutes. Examples include Open Hearth Community Center in Vermont’s Mad River Valley<sup>5</sup> and Early Learning Ventures in Colorado.<sup>6</sup> The Early Learning Ventures approach also included some training and substitute educator support and operates in partnership with several Substitute Placement Agencies - a distinct child care license category introduced in Colorado in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

Child Caring Now (CCN), an initiative of the Great Start Collaborative Traverse Bay, created a preliminary sub pool in 2023. The CCN Sub Pool Action

<sup>3</sup> “MDHS Launches Initiative for Child Care Programs”; <https://www.mdhs.ms.gov/post/mississippi-department-of-human-services-launches-initiative-to-create-new-child-care-programs-and-develop-a-statewide-substitute-teacher-pool/>

<sup>4</sup> “Platform to Help Child Care Providers with Substitute Support” <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/wonderschool-acquires-childcarematters-subpool-platform-to-help-child-care-providers-with-substitute-support-302120389.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.valleyreporter.com/index.php/news/local-news/16707-open-hearth-facilitates-substitute-pool-for-child-care-providers>

<sup>6</sup> <https://cdec.colorado.gov/implement-a-substitute-fund-pilot>

<sup>7</sup> <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb18-162>



*“A key finding of the Child Caring Now team is that without a single entity willing to serve as employer of record, the practicality of a system-wide substitute pool is limited.”*

Team created a standard agreement that could be used between multiple providers and substitutes, and the Action Team recruited and trained five individuals to serve as substitutes within Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau Counties. A key finding of the CCN team is that without a single entity willing to serve as employer of record, the practicality of a system-wide substitute pool is limited. Without this singular employer, employees need to effectively be “hired” by each facility where they do work, including going through extra verification and administrative processes.<sup>8</sup>

## Summary

To be truly effective at supporting the entire mixed-delivery child care system, a regional child care substitute pool requires the following components:

- A single employer of record who is willing to hire substitutes, ensure their compliance with state-mandated requirements, manage them and place them in child care settings
- Communications capabilities across media to be able to recruit interested candidates
- A digital system for scheduling substitute shifts that is easy to use for both child care providers and substitutes

- Physical documentation of background checks and fingerprints that can be maintained at each site where the substitute will work
- Ideally, funding to pay for fingerprinting and registration fees so that these don't need to be paid by the prospective substitute
- An outside source of funding/investment and logistical support to allow the substitute pool to provide a consistently high-quality group of substitute educators without needing to pass along the full cost to financially constrained child care providers

## Potential Near-Term Actions

**Child care advocates** interested in launching or expanding substitute pools should identify a local or statewide agency willing to serve as the employer and operator of the pool.

**Local funders** should invest in child care substitute pools to bridge the gap between what it costs to create a high-quality program and what providers are able to pay.



**Child care providers** should work to ensure substitutes are supported and have positive experiences so that they remain in the system and potentially consider advancing along the career pathway.

<sup>8</sup> Note, even with a singular employer the site-specific onboarding topics such as emergency procedures, day to day operations, etc. would need to be completed and documented for each site. Some universal licensing requirements would not need to be duplicated

**Networks Northwest Coalition**

**Regional Child Care Plan 2024**