

Lutheran Schools Report May 2025

In the recent biennium, Lutheran Schools at the early childhood through grade twelve level served more children than ever in the history of WELS. The trend that began during COVID has continued, though appears to have leveled off in the 2024-25 school year. Though the number of students has risen, the actual number of locations where WELS schools are operated has dropped to 411, as smaller and more rural congregations have struggled to support a school.

Enrollment Growth/Decline 5 years

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Early childhood ministry	9,803	11,672	12,009	11,799	11,338
Lutheran elementary school	24,618	26,586	27,578	28,081	28,361
Area Lutheran high school	5,874	6,041	6,416	6,779	6,879
Preparatory school	581	605	601	602	605

Principal and Early Childhood Director Training Programs

The Principal Training Program has been well received by WELS congregations and provides exceptional support, mentoring, and training for potential principals graduating from Martin Luther College (MLC). Those assigned to the Principal Training Program intern for three years with an experienced and high-performing principal and then become eligible for a call of greater leadership in the third year of their assignment to take what they've learned to a ministry with a principal vacancy. Additionally, those candidates are granted up to 15 credits of MLC's MS in Educational Administration program as well. Currently 20 completers of the program are serving as school principals in WELS schools. This three-year program has been adapted for early childhood directors. In May 2021, the first individual was assigned to the Director Training Program. Four women are now learning through this program, and one completer has accepted a call to serve as a director. We are thankful the Conference of Presidents Assignment Committee and local congregations have committed to this training program option prior to teachers serving in school leadership roles.

Principal Credential and Early Childhood Emerging Leader Cohorts

The Principal Credential Cohort equips veteran teachers to serve as principals before they receive a principal call. Members of the Principal Credential Cohort receive encouragement and support from mentors and other cohort members and attend at least three leadership training events, including a national leadership conference. They also enroll in MLC's MS in Educational Administration program and/or demonstrate competence in the WELS Principal Standards. Twenty-four participants who have either completed or are currently in the program are serving as principals or in higher leadership in WELS schools.

The Emerging Leader Cohort for early childhood directors provides professional development and training to those not yet serving as an early childhood director or those new to the director role. The cohort provides support from mentors and fellow participants, three leadership training events, and ongoing opportunities to grow and learn as a leader. Those enrolled in either cohort and in MLC's master's program receive a 50 percent scholarship for their coursework.

Growth in special education

The number of students in WELS schools with an identified disability, a service plan, and/or instructional modifications has grown in the last three biennium from 3,564 to 5,944 special needs students served in our schools. During that same period, the number of licensed or degreed special education teachers in our schools has grown from 163 to 222.

A small, yet growing percentage of Lutheran schools are serving many students with exceptionalities well, while many schools desire to serve more but lack the resources to provide the desired environment for the students they seek to serve. Steps are being taken to identify and implement supported pathways for special education teacher training and licensure in WELS schools. A recent large gift to Lutheran Schools may allow for a scholarship program much like the Principal Credential Cohort for interested teachers with a special education minor to gain a special education master's degree and or licensure. Dr. Rachel Youngblom and I have just begun working on that pathway.

Early Childhood Ministry support resource

Each week, more than 11,000 children are brought by their families to one of our 345 WELS early childhood ministries. God has provided an opportunity to "serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13b). This resource has been created with the intent to provide an understanding of what Christ-centered, high-quality early childhood ministry includes along with ways to support those serving in an early childhood ministry. It is written for stakeholders and church leaders seeking to build and strengthen the early childhood ministry and those serving in them so that we can maximize the opportunities and minimize the barriers to provide gospel-focused excellence in early childhood care and education.

Resources for boards and school leaders

Early in the new biennium the commission plans to launch resources for school leaders at all levels and leadership boards to work effectively and in harmony. Updated handbooks, training manuals, and clarifications of roles and responsibilities will be included. The Lutheran Schools team will once again host a summer seminar and provide resources and support to both teachers and pastors who find themselves filling a vacancy temporarily or permanently in school leadership positions. We will connect them to appropriate coursework options through MLC as well.

National Education Conference in Green Bay

To date, 430 teachers have registered for the WELS National Education Conference in Green Bay, Wis., on June 22-25, 2025. Dr. Luke Thompson from MLC and Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion*, will keynote a strong conference focused on student learning.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Rademan
Director, WELS Lutheran Schools