The Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) is one of the nation’s oldest and most highly esteemed university-based education research and development centers. WCER is committed to improving educational outcomes for the nation’s diverse student population, improving education practice, and fostering collaboration among disciplines and with practitioners.

Housed within the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison), WCER provides a productive environment where scholars conduct basic and applied education research and development. WCER research spans the full scope of education, from elementary education to undergraduate and graduate curriculum reform. WCER is home to centers for research on the improvement of mathematics and science education from Kindergarten through postsecondary levels, the strategic management of human capital in public education, and value-added achievement, as well as a multistate collaborative project to develop assessments for English language learners, the Minority Student Achievement Network, and Wisconsin’s Equity and Inclusion Laboratory. Other WCER projects focus on education policy, special education, teacher professional development, equitable outcomes and inclusion in education, social capital and children’s development, education technology, school finance and human resource management, English language learning and assessment, literacy, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

WCER combines the talents of scholars from many disciplines to focus on the problems of learning, teaching, assessment, and policy in today’s education systems. WCER researchers and staff explore critical research subjects and their translation into positive impact on education practice and student learning. WCER collaborations with educators around Wisconsin and the United States have developed and implemented innovations in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For example, WCER is home to ACCESS for ELLs®, a standards-based assessment of English language proficiency for schoolchildren used throughout the nation. Another example is Mathematics in Context, a comprehensive mathematics curriculum for Grades 5–8 used by schools across the United States.

A commitment to disseminating research findings and research-based educational interventions and products has characterized WCER from its inception in 1964, building on UW–Madison’s strong tradition of scholars joining together across disciplines to work on significant research problems. WCER researchers come from such diverse backgrounds as astronomy, biology, economics, engineering, law, mathematics, psychology, and sociology, as well as from most areas of specialization within the School of Education. WCER employs more than 100 graduate students in these varied fields who participate in the work of the center while they gain research training and often opportunities to publish collaboratively with senior researchers. WCER hosts two training programs, one for social science doctoral students conducting research on a broad range of education topics and the other for postdoctoral fellows conducting research on mathematics education.

WCER projects are funded by a variety of government agencies, including the Institute of Education Sciences and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health,
as well as by a number of private foundations and other organizations. WCER’s outside funding exceeds $65 million annually.

Robert Mathieu, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor in the Department of Astronomy at UW–Madison, has served as director of WCER since 2013. He is a national leader in the advancement of STEM undergraduate learning and has led a number of research projects at WCER. He leads the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL). Since 2003, this network of more than 40 universities has prepared future faculty to be superb teachers and leaders of national STEM higher education.

WCER is housed in the Educational Sciences Building, a facility built with matching state and federal funds and dedicated to education research and development. The building offers conference rooms that are flexibly furnished and can be arranged for formal presentations, roundtable sessions, or small group work. All rooms are equipped for audio and video presentations and for teleconferencing and videoconferencing. WCER offers business and grant administration services; communication and dissemination services; and technical services. The annual budget for these is approximately $6 million, approximately 40% of which is generated through external grants.

WCER’s Business Office provides projects with budgeting, forecasting, accounting and financial management, and human resource management. The Director’s Office provides researchers with a professional editor who specializes in pre-award editorial support on competitive grant proposals and disseminates research through a working paper series (http://wcer.wisc.edu/publications/working-papers). A communications unit disseminates research findings by coordinating and promoting lectures and other research-related events, as well as by sharing information via print, digital, and social media. Communications vehicles include the WCER website (www.wcer.wisc.edu/) and sites of colleagues and stakeholders, newsletters, Twitter, Facebook, videos of lectures and researcher interviews, flyers, the UW–Madison campus news service, and global external media. Services of the Education Outreach and Partnerships Office within the UW–Madison School of Education are also available to WCER, offering support for collaboration with and dissemination of research to PK–12 Wisconsin schools.

The WCER Technical Services Department provides multimedia services, custom software development, and computer support for more than 600 networked computer systems. Data warehousing and network operations are supported by more than 60 servers, including data warehouse servers running Enterprise MS-SQL 2008R2 on a Windows 2008R2 Server. Security is managed through firewall rules and active directory. These resources provide WCER with the capability to manage data sets containing sensitive student and school information. Technical Services supports multiple graphics and video workstations that facilitate the integration of computer and multimedia technologies, including videoconferencing, teleconferencing, video projection, large-format color printing, and all major video and audio formats. In addition, the department includes a state-of-the-art multimedia studio staffed by multimedia artists, animators, and programmers. Technologies available to projects include broadcast quality HD digital video editing systems, industry standard video encoders, and CD-ROM and DVD authoring tools, as well as professional video and audio recording hardware. Technical Services also supports a number of collaborative technologies, including large-scale, toll-free teleconferencing; point-to-point video conferencing; and web-based desktop sharing tools. In support of collaborative research, WCER has deployed an enterprise-level web-based collaborative environment to
facilitate distributed work and data sharing across complex partnerships while maintaining security. This environment is backed up by a relational database for tracking and reporting project activities and outputs, and monitoring project status.

UW–Madison School of Education is consistently ranked one of the top schools of education in the country. For 2020, U.S. News & World Report ranked the UW–Madison School of Education third in the nation. In the specialty rankings, the School of Education is home to nine specialty programs ranked among the top 10 in the nation: first in rehabilitation counseling (tied); second in curriculum and instruction; second in educational administration and supervision (tied); second in educational psychology; third in education policy; third in student counseling and personnel services (tied); fourth in elementary education; fifth in secondary education; and eighth in special education.

UW–Madison is recognized throughout the world as one of the great U.S. universities. Founded in 1848, UW–Madison is the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin System and the original 1862 land grant university in Wisconsin. It continues to be Wisconsin’s comprehensive teaching and research university with a statewide, national, and international mission. The university’s academic reputation has been rated among the best in the country in many areas of study for more than 100 years. U.S. News & World Report ranked UW–Madison tied for 15th among U.S. public universities for 2019. National Science Foundation figures for 2017 show that UW–Madison is sixth in the nation for research and development expenditures. Total UW–Madison funding from federal, state, and private sources exceeds $1 billion.

In every sense, UW–Madison is a public university. Active in the dissemination of knowledge, the university is guided by the “Wisconsin Idea,” which holds that education should influence and improve people’s lives beyond the university classroom. The university’s longstanding partnership with Wisconsin and its residents is an integral component of its mission to create, integrate, transfer, and apply knowledge. Central to the university’s mission is a commitment to achieve diversity in its faculty, students, and staff and to be responsive to groups that have traditionally been underserved by higher education.