

Principles for Child Care and Pre-K Every Family Can Count On

We are parents, providers, educators, and the community united for high-quality child care and pre-K for all families, fair reimbursement rates for providers, a minimum of \$15 an hour for educators (with wage parity with K-12 staff with equivalent education and experience), and a union for all workers in the industry.

BACKGROUND

Our child care and early learning system is failing everyone.

The high costs of quality care are crushing working and middle class families and putting care out of reach for millions of parents. [Subsidized child care is increasingly inaccessible even to those who qualify](#) (only one in six eligible families receive a subsidy). Child care educators – 95% of whom are women, the majority women of color – can barely afford to take care of their own families because they earn poverty wages in jobs with little security and predictability, and without basic benefits such as paid sick leave.

At the same time, only [29 percent of 4-year-olds and 5 percent of 3-year-olds are enrolled in publicly-funded pre-K programs](#). [Pre-K teachers earn half of what Kindergarten teachers earn](#), making it hard to recruit and retain the best educators for our children at every step in their learning process.

We have failed as a nation to invest in both high quality child care and pre-kindergarten, even though research demonstrates that [early childhood education provides kids with the tools to succeed in life-long learning](#), and unequal access to needed education contributes to the opportunity gap hurting millions and millions of children.

For a country built on opportunity and equality, America's broken child care and early learning system is indefensible.

The numbers that measure this crisis are staggering. While the [cost of care has nearly doubled since 1997, real wages have stayed the same](#). Today, the [average annual cost of care for one infant and one four-year old](#) in a child care center ranges from \$15,409 in the South to \$22,513 in the Northeast – more than the median rent in every state. The [average annual cost of infant care](#) exceeds annual tuition and fees for a public-four-year university in 28 states and the District of Columbia.

For low-wage workers, these costs make it impossible to get care. For example, in 21 states and the District of Columbia child care workers would need to set aside half of their annual income to pay for the annual costs of infant care.

Moreover, child care and early educators themselves are paid poverty wages. The [median hourly](#) wage for a child care worker is \$9.77, 44 percent below the \$17.40 [median hourly](#) wage of workers in other occupations. That means the average worker makes only \$20,320 per year, nearly \$4,000 below the [poverty level](#) for a family of four. [Almost twenty percent](#) of child care workers live below the poverty level. [Nearly half](#) are [paid so little](#), they are forced to rely on public assistance for basic necessities like food, health care, and housing. The median annual salary for a preschool teacher is only \$28,570.

Low pay for providers and educators hurts our children. Research has shown that [fair wages and working conditions are key predictors of high quality care and child success](#).

Child care challenges are hurting not only children, workers, and families – they are hurting businesses and our economy. According to one survey, [29 percent of employed parents experienced some kind of child care breakdown during a three month period](#), resulting in absenteeism, tardiness and reduced concentration at work. This broken system has real costs: [U.S. businesses lose \\$3 billion annually due to employee absenteeism as the result of child care breakdowns](#).

OUR SOLUTION

A child care and universal pre-K system that works for everyone.

We believe that ensuring every family’s access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning is a critical step toward improving quality of life, raising the incomes of millions of low and moderate income families, achieving racial justice and gender equality, and creating equal social and economic opportunities for all Americans.

In addition to high-quality child care and universal pre-K, working families also need fair work schedules, good jobs, paid family and medical leave, and paid sick days to balance the demands of raising a family and earning a living.

It’s time to guarantee affordable, available, high-quality child care and universal pre-K for every family – so working parents can make ends meet, businesses can compete in today’s economy, and our nation’s children can thrive. Fixing our broken child care and early learning system means that parents will be able to find and afford high-quality child care and pre-K, early childhood educators will have a voice in the system and earn a living wage, and *all* our children will get a strong start.

We need a public investment that’s big enough to make child care and pre-K affordable for families *and* invest in the child care workforce to ensure quality jobs and quality care.

FIVE PRINCIPLES

We support proposals to strengthen America’s child care and pre-K system that meet these principles¹.

1. Affordable for all families.

- Provide child care assistance to all families that need it, especially low income families and Black and Brown families who are too often left behind, and working and middle class families who struggle to afford the cost of high-quality care.
- Make child care and pre-K affordable, with no working family having to pay more than 10% of their income on child care and early learning, with additional help to families most in need.
- Make publicly-funded pre-K universally available.

2. Available when and where it is needed.

- Ensure that parents with children under the age of 13 can access high-quality, culturally-appropriate care when and where they need it – during weekends, nights, as their job schedule changes – with options

¹ These principles include those in Congressional Resolutions [S. Res. 293](#)/[H. Res. 386](#).

across school, center, public school, and home settings. Federal standards should encourage the availability of care in community-based centers, public schools, and home child care settings.

- Provide enhanced support for hard-to-find early learning programs and categories of care that are not as available now as they need to be, like infant and toddler care and non-standard hour care.

3. High-quality child care and pre-school for every child.

- Improve the quality of child care and pre-K by guaranteeing early childhood educators a wage of at least \$15 an hour and wage parity with K-12 staff with equivalent education and experience, and expanding training opportunities.
- Set rates for child care programs across settings (centers, family child care and family, friend, and neighbor) that allow providers to deliver the highest quality care.
- Give workers, providers, and parents a voice in the early learning system to advocate for higher workplace standards and improved quality of education and care for our children.
- Professionalize and improve the economic stability and racial and ethnic diversity of the workforce through a dedicated source of public funding, with financial assistance and reasonable time to meet new standards. This must also include investing in the current racially diverse workforce and providing new educational opportunities for existing providers.

4. Fully funded and guaranteed.

- Guarantee that *all* children have equal access to high-quality care and pre-K.
- Guarantee that all families eligible for care will receive it, by creating a public system that expands with need.
- Provide sufficient public investment to ensure adequate resources for both affordable, high-quality early learning and care, and support for high-quality jobs.

5. Fairly funded based on shared responsibility.

- Together, parents, businesses, and local, state and federal governments have a shared responsibility to support a child care and early learning system that works for everyone.
 - The federal government must play an active role, with states, to share the responsibility of ensuring a stable, high-quality system.
 - Profitable corporations and wealthy individuals have a responsibility for investing in high-quality, flexible, affordable, and available child care, rather than having low and middle income families continue to bear these costs alone.
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