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# Child Care is Essential to Enhance Productivity Today and Tomorrow

Access to high-quality child care can make current workers more productive and help build a stronger future workforce in New York and beyond

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Like most people who work in business, one of the more pressing questions on my mind is, “Will we have the strong workforce we need in the future?” Another is, “How can we make our current workforce more productive?”

Believe it or not, both questions have the same answer.

First, let’s look at our current workforce. A lack of access to quality child care drains our productivity. Here’s why: As of 2016, 65 percent of children under the age of six in New York have both parents or their single parent in the workforce. That’s 860,000 kids statewide with no parents at home during work hours. Yet, 42 percent of three- and four-year-olds in the state weren’t enrolled in preschool, either.

With so many households with working parents and young children not in preschool, there’s a tremendous need for child care in New York. That need reduces productivity, as parents without access to high-quality child care more often have to leave work or become distracted from job responsibilities as they devote time and resources during work hours to child-care-related concerns.

Research backs up that point, as a study [highlighted by the business-leader group ReadyNation](#) shows that women who have access to child-care subsidies not only earn more, but they are more likely to work, more likely to work more hours, and more likely to find stable employment.

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*“With benefits that span two generations, it’s clear that ensuring access to high-quality child care should be a priority for the business community.”*

— BOB HAIGHT, PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE CORTLAND COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Second, there's that future workforce that all of our employers need. Again, research supports the idea that high-quality child care can help lay the groundwork for creating tomorrow's skilled workers. One study showed that kids who had higher-quality child care were more prepared for school at age four than were children who had lower-quality child care. And these results persisted years later, as the study further showed that these kids continued to perform above their peers at age 15. They also experienced lower levels of behavioral problems. Meanwhile, another recent study found that high-quality, full-day child care had a positive impact on language development at age two.

It comes as no surprise that high-quality experiences at a very young age can have lasting, positive outcomes as children grow. That's because high-quality child care potentially affects these children at a unique time of brain development—when a child forms over a million new neural connections every second. Scientific consensus says that brain development from birth to age five forms the foundation for a child's future success.

With benefits that span two generations, it's clear that ensuring access to high-quality child care should be a priority for the business community. But the system we currently have isn't meeting the needs of families. In particular, child care in the state of New York is expensive, with the average annual cost of infant center-based care being almost double the cost of tuition and fees at a public four-year college.

That's why we need to work to make changes that will help more families access quality child care. In particular, expanding the number of qualified families served would assist New York counties that regularly exhaust child care funding allocations before meeting the needs of all eligible families.

To do that, our lawmakers should direct a portion of economic development funds to help increase access to high-quality child care for at-risk families. In addition, they should restore the child care subsidy program to the funding level that was established in 2016, which would adjust for both the 2017 cut of \$7 million and two years' worth of inflation. These changes would help working families, their children, and the economy.

With the restored funding, we need to expand the income guidelines in order to serve a larger portion of the families who need it most. Too often, we have families just out of reach of the guidelines who need the assistance.



While some may not think of investments in child care as traditional economic development, the reality is—and the research tells us—that child care is an important part of the infrastructure that builds the “bridges” and “roads” that get today’s youngest learners to tomorrow’s workforce.

For the sake of our children, their working parents, and our economy, it’s an investment we must make.

*Bob Haight is President & CEO of the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce and a member of ReadyNation.*

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