

Oregon Commission for Child Care



Report to the Governor and Legislature
2003 – 2005

In Remembrance

Arlene Collins

Commission for Child Care Chairperson 1988 - 1994

Message from Chair Kitty Piercy

Today's children are the adults, the parents, workers and leaders of tomorrow. Early childhood is a critical time for developing the skills and abilities for success in school and later in life. During the early years, children depend upon adults to meet their needs and make decisions on their behalf. Chief among these decisions is how young children will spend their time while their parents are working.

Today's families have changed and so have the childhood experiences of children nationwide. The majority of parents with young children are dual-wage earners and single parents working outside the home. The need for good, affordable child care has never been greater. That this care is not of good enough quality or is in short supply, and that many families cannot afford it, should concern all of us.

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As we Oregonians pull together to address the economic downturn, we must acknowledge that child care is essential for working parents and their employers. We must also seek viable ways for more families to afford child care that is of the quality necessary for our children's healthy development. Some might wish to turn back the clock to the "Ozzie and Harriet" model in which the father worked and the mother cared for the children at home. Instead of wishful thinking, we need innovative, collaborative problem-solving to ensure that good-quality child care is widely available.

In this report the Commission for Child Care offers recommendations to Governor Kulongoski and the 72nd Oregon Legislative Assembly. These recommendations are based on findings of the Oregon Task Force on Financing Quality Child Care. Mandated by legislation and convened by the Commission for Child Care, the task force sought ways for quality child care to be within the reach of all families.

The task force identified improvements that can be implemented with existing public and private resources. Among these is the development of a reliable method to measure quality among all child care programs to better inform consumers and to guide policy decisions. The task force also sought to address good quality child care as a key component in state and local planning and service delivery to children and families. The task force believes that child care should be addressed within its broader societal impact and supported through a combination of public and private funds.

We offer these recommendations as a means to improve the lives of children, families and all Oregonians and the well-being of our society.

Purpose

The Commission for Child Care is created within the Employment Department to address the issues, problems and alternative solutions that are critical to the development of accessible, affordable and quality child care services. (ORS 657A.600 to 657A.630)

The Commission for Child Care consists of 18 members that appointed by the Governor, Senate President and Speaker of the House. Fifteen voting members serve three-year terms as volunteers. They are child care providers and consumers, medical and legal professionals, and representatives of business, labor, government, and the public at-large. Three non-voting members are representatives of the Oregon Legislative Assembly who serve two year-year terms. The chair of the Commission is appointed by the Governor for a term of one year.

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Since its creation in 1985, the Commission for Child Care has successfully advocated for major building blocks of Oregon's child care system that include the following:

- Establishment of Oregon's parental leave law in 1987 and subsequent refinements in 1995;
- State tax credit for employers who subsidize or provide dependent care for their employees;
- Oregon's statewide child care resource and referral network that assists parents, providers and employers;
- Establishment of the Child Care Division that oversees the administration of the federal Child Care Block Grant and regulates the provision of child care in Oregon;
- State registration of family child care providers;
- Professional development of family child care providers through mandatory training and greater access to homeowners' insurance coverage;
- Mandated in-home health and safety reviews for newly registered child care providers; and the
- Establishment of a task force on financing quality child care.

Commission Members

Kitty Piercy, Chair, Eugene
Member At-Large

Cynthia Hurkes, Roseburg
Resource & Referral Agency

Vicki Sarazin, Tualatin
Tax/Legal

Lisa Kopetski, Pendleton
Child Care Provider

David Barenberg, Portland
State/Local Government

John DeGroat, Estacada
Business

Gabriela Downey, Portland
Labor

Martha Young, Roseburg
Member At-Large

Cheryl Reece, Portland
Child Care Provider/Trainer

Robi Ingram-Rich, Lake Oswego
Medical

Katherine Criswell, Portland
Business

Rosetta Wangerin, Woodburn
State Government

John Sandusky, Tillamook
Nonprofit Organization

Senator Bev Clarno, Bend

Representative Laurie Monnes Anderson, Gresham

Representative Rob Patridge, Medford

“Higher quality care is associated with outcomes that all parents want to see in their children, ranging from cooperation with adults to the ability to initiate and sustain positive exchanges with peers, to early competence in reading and math.”

What is Quality and Why It Matters

Child care is a fact of life today. One need only look at the realities of the current work force to recognize the integral role that child care plays in keeping our economic engines running. Parents of very young children are in the labor force in record numbers. An increasing proportion is mothers who are the sole or primary financial supporters of their children, either through divorce or never having married. As a result, there is a tremendous need for good, affordable child care services.

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enabled men to engage in wage-producing jobs. Over time, the child care sector has become a formal part of the economy. Today, child care provides an essential infrastructure which enables mothers and fathers to be employed outside the home and earn necessary income.

As the need for child care has grown, so has the interest in the issue of child care quality. Extensive research is providing valuable insights into the link between child care and child outcomes. We now know that a child's early years are critical for normal physiological, emotional, sociological, and psychological growth and development.

The quality of child care has a crucial influence on the well-being of young children

What are the key ingredients of quality care? Safe, clean surroundings and appropriate space and lighting and equipment are certainly important, but they aren't enough. At the heart of high-quality child care is the nature of

interactions between children and caregivers. Research shows that children develop best if relationships with their caregivers are warm, supportive, responsive and cognitively stimulating. Stability of care is also important; it is hard to form sustained relationships if caregivers come and go.

How does child care today measure up? While there are no Oregon studies of child care quality, generalizations can be made based on research conducted in other states. As an example, the results from the 2000 study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Early Care Research Network suggest that the quality of 61% of settings for young children would be rated as either poor (8%) or fair (53%), with care for infants and toddlers getting the lowest ratings.

1 From *Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Research Council on Medicine, 2000

The fact is that the majority of our children are spending large portions of their developing years in out-of-home care. The existing research clearly suggests that child care quality matters – and that making high-quality child care available, accessible, and affordable is a worthy investment.

The Child Care Dilemma

In recent years substantial progress has been made towards improving childhood care and early learning in our state. These accomplishments include the identification of the essential elements of quality care that apply broadly across all early childhood programs; a career development system with greater opportunities

Many efforts are underway in Oregon to increase collaboration, develop partnerships, and address the child development needs of young children

for provider professional development, education and training; statewide access to resource and referral programs that help parents find and choose quality child care; and better health and safety standards of child care facilities and child care homes.

and address the needs of young children whose parents are working. It's imperative that these advances be preserved and that any new efforts to improve child care build on our state's progress to date.

At the state and local levels, many efforts are currently underway to increase collaboration, develop partnerships,

Despite these advances, child care and child development services are fragmented. The availability of good-quality child care varies widely among Oregon communities. Parents who are more economically advantaged, more educated, and under less stress are more likely to have the resources and energy to search and pay for better-quality care. Within the system of early childhood services and supports, child care continues to be the weakest link.

The Commission convened a Task Force on Financing Quality Child Care

To address these issues, the Oregon Legislature enacted

House Bill 3659 in 2001. The legislation directed the Commission for Child Care to convene a Task Force on Financing Quality Child Care. The task force consisted of thirty-one members representing a cross-section of Oregonians: the Oregon Legislature, state and local government, business, foundations, education, the child care field, and citizens. The charge of the group was to gather information about the availability of quality child care in this state; develop recommendations about how quality child care should fit within the voluntary statewide early childhood system; develop recommendations about how to provide financial support for quality child care; and develop recommendations on long-term planning to provide quality child care statewide as driven by local community needs.

The task force identified key issues that must be addressed for a system of high-quality child care:

- The quality of care that is fundamental to the well being of children is too expensive for many families to purchase on their own, including the families who purchase care with the help of a state child care voucher. The cost of quality care is expensive and affects low-income families disproportionately. They often pay a higher proportion of their income for child care than higher-income families.
- The supply of infant-toddler care is insufficient. Many parents face long waiting lists because fewer infant-toddler slots are available in most Oregon communities. Regulated infant-toddler care – which is more likely to be of higher quality – is especially scarce in rural areas and low-income neighborhoods.

The quality of care fundamental to the well being of children is too expensive for many families to purchase

- Information about the availability and quality of care is lacking. Currently, there is no statewide benchmark to measure and report on the quality of child care programs. Families need reliable information about the indicators of quality in order to make informed choices. In addition, language barriers prevent some families from accessing consumer information.
- Care for children with special needs is especially hard to find. Child care providers need training and information about caring for children with special needs.
- The high turnover rates among child care teachers and staff and among family child care providers are significant barriers to quality improvement. Low wages and lack of adequate benefits are significant challenges to the recruitment, training and retention of qualified men and women in the field.
- Fewer than 4% of Oregon employers are helping with child care. Families could benefit from flex time and paid leave at the birth or adoption of a child. Although state and federal tax incentives exist for companies to establish child care programs, few employers are taking advantage of these benefits.

The commission shall submit to the Governor at the commencement of each biennium a report containing the concerns and issues which have been identified regarding child care quality and affordability, and further identifying the programs, projects and activities which the commission will undertake regarding those issues.

Improving Child Care Quality for All Oregonians

The task force heard from national and state child care experts to address these issues and other concerns about child care. The task force made a series of recommendations within several key areas. (A complete list of all task force recommendations follows this section.)

The task force identified a series of key issues and recommendations

The Commission for Child Care and its partners and other child care stakeholders are beginning the implementation of these issues. The following information is provided to inform the Governor and the Legislature about the recommendations that the Commission will address in the

biennium July 2003 – June 2005:

Quality Standards and Data: Oregon's currently fragmented system of child care can be strengthened through the adoption of quality standards and the acquisition of essential data. These fragments must be built into a coherent system that is recognized and supported by our state and its public and private partners. The goal is to implement a statewide system for measuring and reporting on quality to parents, employers and other decision-makers.

Action: OCCC has adopted seven structural indicators of child care quality as a baseline from which to measure and evaluate the quality of child care statewide. The Oregon Child Care Research Partnership housed at Oregon State University is currently working on a method to measure quality within child care programs throughout the state. Based on structural indicators of quality, a pilot will be initiated and if successful, replicated statewide.

State and Local Planning: Oregon can build on current legislation to acknowledge the critical role of child care and to begin to ensure its place in the state planning processes for child wellness and early education.

Action: House Bill 2191 will include the child care among the priorities of state and local comprehensive, community planning.

Consumer Information: Through strengthening Oregon's network of child care resource and referral programs and other sources of public information, we can inform and educate all parents about the importance of purchasing quality child care for their children. We can develop tools to help parents better identify quality care. We can increase the demand among consumers for more reliable, safe and good-quality care.

Action: House Bill 2191 will reduce the 100% match funding requirement of local communities for the network of child care resource and referral programs.

Employer-Supported Child Care and Flexible Benefits: We can promote existing tax benefits to Oregon employers for helping employees with child care. We can explore a number of proposals for parental leave policies and flexible, supportive workplaces that help employees balance personal issues as long as business needs are met.

Action: The Commission for Child Care is a partner in the Oregon Child Care Information Partnership, a collaboration of agencies that provide consumer information about child care. The collaboration is launching “Oregon Employers of Choice,” an initiative to inform employers about the benefits of employer-supported child care.

Child Care Funding Streams and Low-Income Subsidy: We can refine the use of existing funding streams and tax incentives to address the quality of child care. We can strengthen our current subsidy program for low-income families so they remain in the workforce and have access to high quality care. In addition, we can generate new revenue through creative funding mechanisms.

Action: The Commission for Child Care is working with the Oregon Childhood Care and Education Coordinating Council, a group convened by the Child Care Division to advise on Child Care Block Grant funding priorities. A subcommittee of the council is working with the Department of Human Services to evaluate the low-income child care subsidy.

Long-Term Funding Mechanisms: Economists describe child care as a case of market failure – a market which left on its own, neither efficiently nor effectively delivers services. Researchers find that the quality of child care is not high enough to produce positive child outcomes. Yet, costs are already higher than the most low- and middle-income families can afford. Clearly, adequate and stable funding is needed to ensure that all Oregonians have access to good-quality care.

Action: The Commission and its partners are pursuing private sector funding to implement the longer-term recommendations of the task force. Resources are needed to develop a five-year strategic plan to improve our child care system. Among the priorities of the plan are evaluating the use of existing funding streams and to develop proposals for new funding mechanisms.

In Conclusion

Before us lies the work of strategic and specific long-term planning for child care. Oregon has taken some very important and essential steps in that direction, but much more must be accomplished in order to engage greater segments of the business, health care and education communities. Caring for the very young is one of our most important responsibilities. Even in difficult economic times, we must preserve these fragile gains and continue to move towards the vision that all children will benefit from consistent, quality early education.

Summary of Task Force Recommendations

Recommendations are represented here with respect to the availability of quality child care, child care in Oregon's early childhood system, the financing of quality child care, and long-term planning for statewide quality child care.

1. Develop the ability to measure and evaluate the quality of child care statewide.
2. Use solid data on child care to drive the planning process for child care investments.
3. Use program and tax expenditures to improve the quality of available child care.
4. Apply workforce training and compensation mechanisms to develop a child care workforce that is better able to provide quality care.
5. Amend Oregon statutes to include child care as a central part of the collaborative, coordinated, comprehensive system of care for Oregon's children and families.
6. Engage the business community, higher education and others as partners in the advocacy and planning for a quality child care system.
7. Improve Oregonians' ability to locate and make informed decisions about quality child care.
8. Explore the full use of existing funding streams to improve the quality of care.
9. Explore the creation of new revenue streams to pilot new ways of financing child care.
10. Improve the ability of low-income families to afford quality child care.
11. Encourage Oregon businesses to explore the benefits of employer-sponsored child care and flexible and supportive workplaces.
12. Expand the ability of the state's child care resource and referral programs to respond to family, employer and community needs.
13. Engage Oregon businesses as allies in supporting families and advocating for public support of child care.
14. Develop strategies to better inform all sectors of society about the benefits of high quality child care.
15. Recognize and address child care as fundamental and vital to Oregon's future.

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