



Employer Child Care Strategies: 5 Things To Consider

JUNE 26, 2024 – JULIE KASHEN, LEA WOODS, AND LAUREN HOGAN

Employer Child Care Strategies: 5 Things To Consider

JUNE 26, 2024 – JULIE KASHEN, LEA WOODS, AND LAUREN HOGAN

The pandemic shutdown and the following return to the workplace demonstrated that child care is essential infrastructure, as critical for supporting families and the economy as roads and bridges. Its many positive externalities offer a clear case for treating it as a public good. Yet, while child care that nurtures children and supports their early learning and well-being is a necessity and should be guaranteed for all families who need it, in practice, it remains out of reach for many.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen calls child care “[a textbook example of a broken market](#).” Families cannot afford child care prices that [often rival the cost of rent, mortgages, or public college tuition](#), but even these high prices do not reflect the [true cost of running a high-quality child care program](#). The solution to this problem of a broken market is robust investment of public funds in the child care sector—something that parents, early childhood educators, and child care advocates have been working tirelessly toward in order to build a robust, equitable child care sector that is affordable and accessible to all.

Employers are also increasingly recognizing that, until this robust child care sector materializes, families will need immediate child care solutions, and so more employers are stepping into the child care space in order to recruit and retain employees. In particular, companies receiving

grants through the CHIPS Act are [required to make plans to provide child care services](#) to their manufacturing and construction workers, spurring a flurry of activity as these employers try to build or piece together child care options for their workforces.

Some of the options that employers are pursuing—in [collaboration with child care advocates and state and local governments](#)—have the potential to provide positive, incremental progress toward solving child care challenges while serving as stepping stones to the comprehensive, publicly funded child care system that families, employers, and communities all need. However, without thoughtful design and implementation, employer-led work in the child care sector can actually undermine progress, exacerbate existing problems, and divert money to the kinds of limited solutions that don’t meet the true needs of employees, their families, their children, or their communities.

With employers’ recently renewed attention to innovating on child care benefits for their workforces, this commentary highlights five key considerations for employers to help them be most effective in their engagement with the child care sector.¹ If employers truly want to provide accessible, affordable, high-quality child care to their workforces, their efforts should do the following:

This commentary can be found online at: [tcf.org/content/commentary/employer-child-care-strategies-5-things-to-consider/](https://www.tcf.org/content/commentary/employer-child-care-strategies-5-things-to-consider/)

1. Create Good Jobs for Early Childhood Educators

Without well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated early childhood educators, any child care options that employers provide their employees will be marked by turnover, inconsistency, and instability, making that approach harder, more expensive, and less effective. A focus on recruiting, training, and retaining early childhood educators is key.

Employers should ask themselves: Are the child care solutions they are using prioritizing fair wages, benefits, and working conditions for early childhood educators based on recognition of their valuable and complex work?

2. Maximize Options for Families

Parents often require access to multiple child care options to accommodate complex work schedules, the number and ages of children they have, program distance from home, disabilities, cultural and linguistic preferences, and budget.

Employers should ask themselves: Are they supporting the varied needs of their employees and their families by offering a range of options and partnering with and investing in existing community-based centers and family child care homes that effectively and equitably serve families and children?

3. Put Children at the Center

The first years of a child's life are the period of the most rapid brain development and lay the foundation for all future learning. The long-term benefits of supporting children's positive growth and development—as future citizens and members of the workforce—accrue for society as a whole. Families who have entrusted their children to child care providers so they can work need to know that their children are safe, happy, and learning in the context of positive interactions with adults, peers, and their environment.

Employers should ask themselves: Are they supporting and making available to their employees and the community the high-quality child care that children need to thrive?

4. Be Collaborative Community Partners

Employers that focus only on their employees' needs risk inadvertently worsening the existing child care supply shortage for their broader community—including the people who teach their children, staff their hospitals, and work in their grocery stores and restaurants. In addition, pooling resources in partnership with other employers, state and local government, or philanthropy can expand the options available for building out child care options for the whole community.

Employers should ask themselves: Are they engaging early, often, and directly with parents, providers and other child care experts—from state associations for the education of young children (AEYC) to child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) to unions? Are they working with these partners to help identify gaps and make the most informed decisions about how to fill them while building the supply of high-quality child care in local communities, especially for those who most need it?

5. Advocate for Public Investments

In order to achieve affordable, accessible, reliable, and high-quality child care that supports their current and future workforces, employers will need to have the resources to invest. That's why the most important approach employers can take is to advocate for a robust child care and early learning system paid for with public dollars.

Employers should ask themselves: Are they standing with other employers, parents, educators, and advocates calling for more public investment in child care, in states and on the national level?

Looking Ahead

To support our nation's workforces, child care and early learning programs must be accessible, affordable, reliable, respond to families' needs, and ensure children are safe, nurtured, and learning. Aligning with these considerations can help employers create stepping stones toward the shared goals of robust, comprehensive public investment in child care and early learning, while setting themselves, their employees, their employees' children, and their communities up for success.

This commentary was written in partnership with the National Association for the Education of Young Children. (NAEYC).

Notes

1 These considerations are informed by and aligned with the recommendations from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Child Care for Every Family Network, Ohio Action for Children, and others who have also begun laying out considerations for employer-engagement in child care.