

Local View: Quality child care benefits everyone

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The coronavirus has impacted every aspect of our daily lives. We wait and hope for a return to some sense of normalcy. We are cautiously optimistic that businesses will start to rebuild, our economy will begin to grow and that those furloughed or laid off will get back to work. Access to affordable child care will be an essential component of our economic recovery.

Prior to COVID-19, employers and working families depended on safe, high-quality child care. Child care is a fundamental pillar of economic prosperity for business and for families.

Unfortunately, child care is often ignored or taken for granted despite the key relationship between child care and optimal workforce engagement. Providers are burdened by costs associated with increasingly regulated teaching standards and administrative requirements, and these costs get passed on to parents.

As a result, working parents that don't qualify for a child care subsidy are faced with mounting child care costs. And yet programs are still operating at a deficit because child care revenue is insufficient to cover the full cost of care.

In March, just prior to the pandemic, Support for Early Learning & Families in partnership with the Vancouver Chamber of Commerce conducted a child care survey of local businesses and employees. Sixty-nine percent of employees who completed the survey stated that the cost of child care posed a significant financial hardship or prevented them from accessing child care in the first place. Today, across the state and certainly in Clark County, we are seeing large numbers of child care programs close. In 2018, Clark County had 213 licensed child care programs; today there are 123. This is concerning because 58 percent of children under 5 in Clark County live in a household where all parents work.

As employees across our community go back to work, we must ask ourselves where will their children go? And if they find child care, will they be able to afford it?

Child care providers in our community are creative, hard-working, educated, and experienced. They are dedicated to the children and families in their programs. But they can't provide care if they can't afford to keep their business open.

Accessible child care facilities will result in a stronger functioning economy for all of us. The economic gains we hope to recover will only occur if we take a close, serious look at improving our child care system. Businesses, policy leaders, educators, parents and concerned citizens must work together toward a solution that includes child care in our local economic recovery plan.

Together we can fix the child care system. With smart, strategic investments, policy changes and recovery dollars change is possible. We invite you to join us in supporting affordable, accessible, high-quality child care in our community. Go to [selfwa.org/childcare](http://selfwa.org/childcare) to confirm your support and for more information.

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