



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Better Pay for Child Care Professionals Will Mean Higher-Quality Care for Kids

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Child care providers serving low- and moderate-income DC families often do not have the resources needed to support a strong and stable workforce. That makes it hard to provide the kind of care that helps young children start their education off on the right foot. And it makes it hard for working parents to find a nearby child care center where they can leave their children with confidence.

Improving resources for DC's child care subsidy program can help address this problem.



That is one of the early findings of research DCFPI is conducting with DC Appleseed to examine the cost of providing quality child care for infants and toddlers in the District, based on interviews with child care providers serving families in DC's child care subsidy program. While findings and recommendations will not be released until early 2016, we shared a few initial trends at a DC Council hearing on early care and early learning held on Saturday:

Compensation and Benefits for Child Care Professionals: Many providers reported paying extremely low wages and offering no employee benefits – such as health care or retirement plans. This stems largely from low per-child reimbursements in DC's child care subsidy program, amidst other pressures to maintain quality programs. When asked what types of investments they would make if they received a 10 percent to 20 percent increase in program income, the majority said they would offer better compensation and benefits for their staff.

Capacity to Serve Children with Disabilities: Many child care centers and homes need additional services to identify and address developmental delays or disabilities and ensure that families are aware of the supports available to them. Child care providers play an important role here, but they get no additional resources from the District to fulfill it. Several providers spoke favorably about DC's Healthy Futures program, which provides mental health consultation to staff to promote children's positive social emotional development and reduce behavioral problems. These types of consultants can connect families with early intervention services or help them navigate the special education system. We hope to see more of these types of programs accessible to community-based providers.

Alignment of the District’s Early Childhood Programs: The needs of young children are complex – including health care, nutrition, cognitive and social development – and DC families with young children often interact with several different public services to get their needs met. In a 2012 [scan](#) of early childhood programs and services in the District, DCFPI identified about 30 programs across six agencies that serve young children (age 0-5) and their families. The city should continue to work on ways to deliver these services in a coordinated way to help ease the burden on families and streamline access to multiple programs at once.

You can find DCFPI’s full testimony [here](#).