

CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN

LWVUS Position adopted in 1988

“Support programs, services, and policies at all levels of government to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it, in order to increase access to employment and to prevent and reduce poverty.”

The League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) conducted its own child care study in 1988, focusing on the needs of children ages one to five, and adopted a position statement in 1989. This position statement includes support for the following:

1. A diverse child care system that encompasses day care centers, group homes, and family day care homes.
2. The establishment of appropriate standards to ensure high-quality care.
3. The enforcement of mandatory regulations, supported by sufficient funding for inspectors.
4. Requirements for adequate training for caregivers.
5. Financial assistance from the state for low- and middle-income families based on need.
6. Elevating the professional status of caregivers and ensuring adequate compensation.

By advocating for these principles, the LWVOR aims to promote a robust child care system that meets the needs of all families in our community.

In January 2023, the LWVOR published an update and expansion of the 1988 child care study. This update examines the status of child care for children ages one to five and extends the focus to include care for infants and older children during after-school and summer hours.

The LWVOR is inviting local leagues to review the updated study and engage in consensus discussions based on specified questions. These discussions will take place during the November unit meetings.

Individuals wishing to contribute can also complete the questionnaire and submit it by email to program@lwvlc.org with the subject line "Child Care Study," or they may mail it to the League Office. All submissions should be received no later than November 22.

The Updated Study

The updated study *Caring for Our Children* is summarized below. The full text of the study can be found at:

https://cf41d81d-4134-43a5-b3ba-312de9b683fb.usrfiles.com/ugd/cf41d8_163bb1d7b8154cec83be558ad3a8b5f3.pdf

Current Condition

In 2019, the Oregon legislature established a Joint Task Force on Access to Quality Child Care. This task force, comprised of legislators, child care providers, parents, advocates, and representatives from state agencies, issued a report titled “Raise Up Oregon” to the legislature.

The findings of the task force highlighted several critical issues:

Funding: The child care system is chronically underfunded, resulting in a lack of uniformly available and affordable quality care. Systemic gaps contribute to disparities based on race/ethnicity, language, geography, disability, and income.

Governance: The governance structure in Oregon is fragmented across multiple agencies, leading to confusion and inefficiency. Families and providers must navigate a complex web of misaligned programs. The siloed, uncoordinated systems create additional hurdles and fail to offer adequate support.

Supply: Oregon currently lacks an effective method for collecting data on the number of parents seeking child care services. The existing methods for tracking the availability of child care slots are outdated and often inaccurate and do not include unlicensed or unregulated informal providers.

Affordability: Child care costs are prohibitively high for most families in Oregon. Parents bear 70% of child care expenses, and many families who require financial assistance do not qualify because their income levels are just above the eligibility threshold. Alarming, only 11% of families eligible for federally subsidized care actually receive support. Additionally, even those who do receive public subsidies often struggle to afford the required copayments.

The legislature has taken several actions in response to the Task Force recommendations including:

1. The passage of the Preschool Promise in 2015 and the Baby Promise in 2019, initiatives aimed at expanding access to early childhood education.
2. The enactment of a tax on businesses to fund the Student Investment Account (SIA), which allocates resources for early childhood services, enhances funding for teacher and counselor positions, and supports after-school and summer enrichment programs (2019).
3. The establishment of the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care, a dedicated agency for child care services, which became operational on July 1, 2023. This agency oversees licensing and offers professional development for early child care providers.
4. The reduction of copays.

The Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program provides funding for child care for low-income families in Oregon. All of the state's Child Care Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are allocated to the ERDC program. To qualify, clients must meet the following criteria:

- Be an Oregon resident.
- Be employed or enrolled in school (in two-parent households, both parents must be employed or in school).
- Be a U.S. citizen or a qualifying non-citizen.
- Have a qualifying child or children (under 13 years old, or aged 13-17 with special circumstances requiring care). Use a child care provider from the list of approved providers maintained by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS).
- Use a child care provider from the list of approved providers maintained by the Oregon Department of Human Services.

The rates paid to child care providers under the ERDC program are determined by factors such as location, the age of the children, and the type of provider. While parents may be required to contribute a copayment, it must be less than 7% of their annual income.

Families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—the federal welfare program—often struggle to access ERDC funding due to the employment requirement. To address this issue, Oregon has established the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, which helps TANF participants move toward employment. The JOBS program allows these participants to access child care assistance while pursuing various goals, including educational opportunities, parenting classes, stable housing, and medical services. However, many of the opportunities offered through the JOBS program are sporadic or part-time, and the benefits will only cover child care for the specific hours needed to pursue these goals. Consequently, many child care providers require children to be enrolled full-time, which poses a challenge for low-income parents who may not be able to afford to pay for the additional hours of care not covered by the JOBS program.

Oregon recognizes five types of child care, each designed to meet the diverse needs of families and children.

1. **Recorded Programs:** These are non-licensed providers that are not eligible for state subsidy reimbursements through the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program. Background checks are required for all staff and volunteers over the age of 18. Recorded programs include preschools that operate for less than four hours a day and programs for school-age children that occur when school is not in session.
2. **Regulated Subsidy Providers:** These non-licensed providers are eligible for subsidy reimbursements through ERDC, but they are not required to be licensed. Regulated subsidy providers encompass family and friend care as well as some programs with limited hours. Background checks are mandatory for staff and volunteers, and these providers are subject to regulations and inspections for health and safety. Additionally, staff members are required to participate in ongoing training.
3. **Registered Family Child Care Programs:** These are licensed, home-based programs that accommodate up to ten children.
4. **Certified Family Child Care:** These licensed, home-based programs can care for up to 16 children.
5. **Certified Child Care Centers:** These licensed programs have capacity limits based on floor space and staffing levels.

The three licensed program types are subject to stringent requirements, including background checks, regular health and safety inspections, and ongoing training. These requirements are more detailed and involve more frequent inspections and higher levels of training compared to exempt providers.

Oregon's publicly funded child care and early education programs include Oregon Pre-Kindergarten, Early Head Start, federal and tribal Head Start, the Oregon Child Development Coalition, Preschool Promise, and Baby Promise. Families must meet the federal poverty guidelines to qualify for these programs. The Oregon Preschool Promise program specifically serves families whose incomes do not exceed 200% of the federal poverty level. As of March 2020, these programs accounted for approximately 20% of the total available child care in the state.

Recent Legislation

The Student Success Act (SSA), enacted in 2019, established the Student Investment Account (SIA), which allocates funds for early learning and K-12 education. Under the SSA, 20% of these funds are designated for early learning initiatives for children from birth to age five, including support for pre-kindergarten programs. The SSA also provides funding for K-12 education to hire additional teachers and school counselors, with the option to use some funds for after-school and summer programs. Each school district receives a share of these funds, which have primarily been utilized to address long-standing staffing shortages for teachers and counselors, leaving little to no funding available for after-school or summer programs.

In 2021, the legislature allocated special funds from federal pandemic relief and state resources to support summer learning programs aimed at helping children recover from the educational disruptions caused by the pandemic.

In 2022, the legislature passed House Bill 4005, which increased reimbursement rates for child care providers serving families receiving assistance through the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs.

What the Research Says: Impacts of Early Learning Programs

Early childhood is widely recognized as the most critical period for brain development in a child's life. Research has shown that high-quality child care can significantly enhance academic performance and foster lifelong success. The Perry Preschool Project, a longitudinal study, demonstrated that quality early

learning programs contribute to higher educational attainment, reduced criminal activity, and improved overall health in participants. Recent studies further confirm that involvement in early learning programs benefits not only the children who participate but also their families and communities.

Impact of After-School Programs

Research indicates that a second period of rapid brain development occurs during adolescence, typically between the ages of 10 and 25. While much of the research on the effectiveness of after-school and summer programs—collectively referred to as out-of-school time (OST) programs—focuses primarily on elementary grades, studies involving adolescents suggest similar positive outcomes.

Some specific benefits of OST programs include:

- Students participating in OST programs are more likely to graduate on time.
- OST enrichment programs help close the achievement gap in math and English for gifted students from economically disadvantaged and diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who participate in OST programs demonstrate improved performance in reading and math, repeat fewer grades, and are less likely to be placed in special education.
- Black students engaged in OST science activities are more likely to enroll in advanced science classes compared to their peers who do not participate.
- OST programs encourage students, particularly women and students of color, to complete high school.
- Investing in OST programs is financially prudent; by age 19, participants are less likely to become parents, and by age 21, they are more likely to be employed or pursuing higher education. At age 30, they are more likely to be employed full-time, in good health, and less likely to rely on social safety net services thus avoiding tens, even hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxpayer burden over the lifetime of an unemployed person.

In Oregon, 72% of parents agree that after-school programs help reduce the likelihood of children engaging in inappropriate risky behaviors, while 79% believe these programs help children develop essential workforce skills.

Although research regarding summer programs and their impact on academic performance is mixed, these programs have consistently been shown to enhance social and behavioral academic outcomes.

Three key conditions characterize successful Out-of-School Time (OST) programs:

1. **Access and Sustained Participation:** There are noticeable gaps in participation related to income. Families with higher income levels and more educational attainment are more likely to engage in OST programs.
2. **Quality Programming and Staffing:** Research indicates that children in higher-quality child care are better prepared for school by age four compared to those in lower-quality settings, and they continue to perform slightly better than their peers at age fifteen. High-quality programs are defined by their ability to foster a proficiency mindset, cultivate intrinsic motivation, and promote a sense of community among participants. In contrast, lower-quality programs tend to feature staff interactions that are more punitive than supportive.
3. **Partnerships:** Programs that foster coordination between students, their schools, families, and other community institutions tend to be more effective.

In 2013, Oregon After School Kids (Oregon ASK) conducted a study to gather parents' perspectives on after-school programs across the state. The demographic composition of participants included approximately 30% native Spanish speakers, with the remainder predominantly white, along with some

representation from Native American, Asian, and Black communities. The study identified several key factors that parents consider when choosing after-school programs, including:

- An adult-supervised, safe environment
- Development of social skills
- Educational and developmental enrichment
- Reinforcement of school-day learning
- Academic learning
- Engagement and enjoyment
- Physical fitness
- Arts
- Healthy snacks or supper
- Science and engineering
- Parent involvement
- Community service
- Writing

Another significant factor highlighted by parents is program availability. Most parents reported that the most valuable time for schools to offer OST programs is from the end of the school day until the typical end of the business day. This is followed by times on atypical weekdays during the school year, such as when school is not in session, or during late starts or early dismissals. Moreover, when parents understood the costs associated with what they considered quality programs, they expressed a willingness to pay for a portion of these expenses.

ISSUES

Access to Child Care

Cost remains the most significant barrier to accessing child care. A 2018 study indicated that, given Oregon's median income of \$78,683, families earning below this median who require care for infants spend over 20% of their income on services that meet the state's minimum licensing standards. For toddlers, this figure is slightly lower, at 18%. The federal government defines affordable child care for infants and toddlers as costing no more than 7% of a household's income.

Even for families that can afford child care, there are often insufficient openings available. According to a 2020 report from the Oregon Early Learning Division, 72% of communities in Oregon are classified as "child care deserts," meaning there is less than one regulated child care space for every three children. Additional barriers to accessing child care include a lack of transportation and irregular parental work hours.

The shortage of child care and out-of-school time (OST) options also poses challenges for employers. Parents frequently worry about being late, leaving work early, or missing shifts due to family illnesses. This situation negatively impacts the economy, leading to reduced tax revenues from lower employee participation when child care is unavailable. A 2019 study by Ready Nation estimated that the lack of child care for infants and toddlers costs the United States approximately \$57 billion annually.

Content in Child Care Programs

As child care programs have evolved from merely providing babysitting services, there has been a growing emphasis on incorporating specific content into their curricula. This includes a focus on trauma-informed care and socio-emotional learning.

Workforce

The workforce in child care, after-school programs, and summer care is predominantly part-time and entry-level. Training for these positions is often brief, and staff who interact directly with children frequently consist of high school or college students, or individuals with limited education. Those with degrees in the field are often underpaid, and the overall compensation remains at entry-level and low wages. This results in high staff turnover, which negatively impacts the quality of care provided to children.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected both the demand for and supply of early child care services. From 2019 to early 2021, after-school and summer programs existed but were restricted in their capacity to serve children. For many parents working from home, available child care slots were limited and often prohibitively expensive. A survey conducted in the fall of 2020 revealed that 59.6% of Oregon families experienced disruptions in their child care arrangements during the pandemic, with 74% of Black families being particularly affected. The lack of reliable child care has been a major factor driving women out of the workforce, especially during the pandemic. A substantial number of assistants and aides who left the early child care workforce since the onset of COVID-19 are uncertain about their return (49.5%) or have decided against it (12.9%). Low wages and a lack of benefits are the most frequently cited reasons for not returning to early childhood care work. Study participants reported that the median salary for an early childhood teacher in Oregon ranges from \$25,000 to \$35,000. The Reimagine Oregon Project has prioritized establishing pay equity for early learning child care providers in its policy proposal.

In 2020, Oregon's Early Learning Division reported a 49% decrease in registered family child care providers. By the fall of 2021, when schools reopened, after-school programs faced significant challenges in finding enough workers. Attracting and retaining staff for after-school care has proven to be exceedingly difficult.

Beth Unverzagt, Executive Director of ASK, has emphasized that the fragmented approach to child care in Oregon presents a major challenge to developing a skilled workforce. For instance, pre-kindergarten child care is regulated by the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC), while after-school and summer programs fall under the purview of the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program, which is part of the Department of Human Services (DHS). The federal government has allocated over \$11 million to Oregon to help fund 21st-century community learning centers. These funds are intended to be administered by individual schools or school districts. Because school districts oversee the funds, the result can be an inconsistent and siloed approach.

Licensing

The licensing process presents a significant barrier to attracting more caregivers into the field. As many caregivers choose not to apply for licensing, the state faces two critical challenges: ensuring the quality of programs and assessing the availability of services provided.

Regulations

The regulations governing early childhood care, after-school programs, and summer care can vary significantly, creating challenges for families with siblings of different ages attending the same program. Additionally, regulations for school-based programs often differ between those that operate during the school day and those that occur after school.

Funding

In Oregon, child care is primarily funded through parent fees. Very few school districts have opted to utilize Student Investment Account (SIA) funds for after-school or summer programs. However, some municipalities in Oregon have successfully identified funding sources for after-school initiatives. For instance, Portland has repeatedly passed a property tax that generates approximately \$20 million annually to support various children's services, including after-school and partial summer programs.

In 2022, the Oregon Department of Education's Early Learning Division released findings from a study focusing on parents from historically marginalized communities. Key findings across all groups highlighted a strong need for child care that is affordable, accessible, and multilingual. Additional insights emphasized the importance of investing in a diverse child care system, stabilizing the child care workforce, providing training for providers, and implementing a system-wide approach to eliminating discrimination and bias within child care services.

What Providers Say

In 2022, the League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) developed a questionnaire to gather insights about child care in local communities. Five out of thirteen local leagues participated, revealing several key themes in their responses:

Affordable training programs are scarce, particularly during weekends and evenings. The certification process for staff is complicated by the involvement of different agencies overseeing facilities based on the age of the children served. Additionally, low wages contribute to significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.

The licensing process is cumbersome, with standards that are often unattainable for the average provider. Furthermore, the lack of coordination and delays in background checks exacerbate the difficulties associated with obtaining and maintaining licenses.

Parents face challenges navigating multiple agencies to find child care options and secure financial assistance. Accessing necessary forms can be particularly difficult for families dealing with barriers such as limited computer literacy or a lack of proficiency in English. Similarly, child care providers must navigate a complex web of agencies to ensure compliance with safety requirements, secure supplemental funding for families in need, and guarantee that their staff receive adequate training.

To foster Oregon's economic growth, it is crucial to address the gap between the cost of providing child care and families' ability to pay. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated staffing shortages, forcing many providers to reduce operations. Consequently, many parents have had to delay reentering the workforce until they can secure reliable child care. Until policymakers recognize child care as a vital component of economic planning, Oregon's economic development will remain suboptimal.

Recommendations

Oregon policymakers should develop a comprehensive long-term plan to support children and families, focusing on effective oversight and strategic planning for child care. This plan should prioritize the following key elements:

1. Emphasize the factors that contribute to a child's success, ensuring that all initiatives align with this goal.
2. Be responsive to the diverse needs of families, taking into account factors such as equity, cultural background, and socioeconomic status.

3. Recognize the critical role of quality child care in Oregon’s economy and include a dedicated funding source for vital programs and services, including after-school and summer programs.
 4. Funding initiatives should focus on:
 - Ensuring equitable pay between school and non-school employees.
 - Providing subsidies for staff training.
 - Offering startup funding to attract new child care providers.
 - Family subsidies
 - Subsidies that consider the full cost of care, including living wages for providers, rent, and operational expenses.
 - Implementing policies that encourage employer-provided or subsidized child care.
 - Addressing transportation challenges for families accessing child care.
 5. Existing regulations should be thoroughly reviewed to assess their impact on all types of child care providers. The goal should be to create a consistent framework for behavioral regulations during both school and non-school hours for programs housed in schools.
 6. Data necessary for evaluation and planning should be coordinated across agencies and school systems.
 7. Long-term evaluations should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of programs and initiatives.
 8. Success for all participants depends on ensuring both the quality of service and the relevance of content. Effective delivery should be guided by clear goals, established guidelines, and oversight mechanisms that promote ongoing process improvement. It is crucial to involve older youth in the planning process to help them cultivate independence and a sense of responsibility. Additionally, considerations of equity, respect, and the diverse cultural needs of all participants should be integrated into the planning efforts to ensure that every child benefits.
 9. Many existing programs face limitations in expansion due to space constraints. Future planning for subsidized housing and new school buildings should include dedicated space for child care services.
 10. Licensing and certification processes should be centralized within a single office, with a thorough review to ensure alignment and consistency. Communication regarding provider requirements should be straightforward and easily understandable.
 11. Staff should be compensated for training time, as training is a prerequisite for employment. Training opportunities should be offered at various times and locations to enhance accessibility. Background checks should be conducted efficiently through a centralized state office.
- By implementing these recommendations, Oregon can create a robust child care system that supports families, fosters child development, and strengthens the economy.

Please note for information regarding child care in Lane County please refer to the Every Member Material, November 2020, LWVLC.org under Library, Publications,EMM

QUESTIONS

1. Oregon should establish a coordinating organization to provide overall planning for care and enrichment for children and youth during non-school time.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____
2. Oregon should conduct an in-depth cost/benefit analysis that includes economic benefits to the economy vs. cost to taxpayers for the public and for the legislature.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____
3. Oregon should provide subsidized funding for afterschool and summer programs that include education, enrichment, and experience.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

4. Oregon should specify a proportion of Student Success Act funding to go to after school and summer programs.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

5. Oregon should provide startup funds for out of school time programs.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

6. Oregon should provide licensing and oversight for all programs involving children and youth zero 0-18 yrs.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

7. Oregon should provide a clear, comprehensive licensing process.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

8. The ERDC should improve their reimbursement system to remove barriers to participation for parents and providers.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

9. Oregon should fund measures of accountability.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

10. Evaluation results of programs (not individual children) should be made public.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

11. Buildings that are publicly funded should provide space for child care.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

12. Facility requirements should be clearly defined to help providers understand and meet regulatory requirements.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

13. Coaching and technical assistance regarding licensing and certification should be made available to providers.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

14. Depending on the age of the children served by a program, the Department of Early Learning and Care or the Oregon Department of Education should provide oversight to ensure goals are met.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

15. Equity, respect, and the needs of diverse cultures should be incorporated into curriculum planning to benefit all children.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

16. Older youth need to be involved in planning to help them develop independence and responsibility.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

17. Programs should have a parent advisory council or committee.

Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

18. Licensing of providers and certification of provider staff should be in one state office.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

19. Background checks should be conducted by one state office with an emphasis on efficient and prompt responses.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

20. Provider staff should be compensated by the provider for training time due to the requirements needed to maintain employment.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

21. Training for provider staff should be offered at a variety of times, at accessible locations, or online, and be available in a variety of languages.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

22. Training for provider staff should be free or subsidized.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

23. Oregon should maintain a centralized database of staff applications and records online and be accessible to provide statewide.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

24. When the latest research on curriculum and procedures are available to programs, it should be disseminated to provider staff.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

25. Credit for certification should be given for work experience comparable to that of care staff who have received a formal education.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

26. There should be equity in salaries between non-school and school employees with the same experience and responsibilities.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

27. The state of Oregon should provide forgivable loans for students in education majors who work in underserved or high poverty areas.
Agree _____ Disagree _____ No Consensus _____ Other _____

Summarized and reviewed by Lori Barker and Sharon Amasha, edited by Merle Bottge.