

# **A Study of the Child Care Workforce in Utah**

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SUMMARY

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As parents struggle to balance the demands of work and family, child care has become a daily reality for more than 13 million children nationwide. The child care system has value not only for children and parents, but for the broader society we all live in. When our children are well taken care of and parents are supported in their ability to work, we all benefit. In this way, the child care system is intrinsically connected to our national goals of economic development, education, child welfare, and youth development.

As a leading child development expert argues, child care has become the fourth social system which, along with the family, health care and schooling, determines, in a large part, the growth and development of the child (Zigler, 1999). This idea is highlighted by the growing number of hours children spend in child care every week. The National Child Care Survey of infants and toddlers revealed that 76% of infants and toddlers with employed mothers spent at least 35 hours a week in child care centers and 69% spent at least 35 hours a week in family child care homes. (NCCIC).

While in the past child care has been viewed as little more than a service that allows parents to work, today we recognize that it is more appropriately seen as an early education environment with a powerful effect on child outcomes. If the quality of a child care setting is high, children thrive and develop optimally; if the quality is low, development can be compromised (Peisner-Feinberg, 1999). When this knowledge is translated into public policy that promotes quality child care, we all benefit.

An adequate supply of affordable quality child care is critical to the economies of every state. It facilitates the work of parents, leading to a more reliable workforce that increases tax rolls while reducing reliance upon welfare and other social services. The lack of suitable and reliable child care can result in absenteeism, tardiness, poor job performance, and unemployment (Campbell, 2000). Furthermore, investing in our child care system not only supports the labor force today but helps build the capacity of each state's workers of tomorrow.

Child care programs can also promote our state and national goals of school readiness. A rich body of research reveals that high quality care is related to higher cognitive performance, greater language ability, and better pre-math and social skills (Karoly, 1998). Research on early brain development and early childhood demonstrates that the experiences children have and the attachments they form early in life have a long-lasting impact on their development and learning. These benefits translate into greater school success all through high school, including higher rates of grade promotion and graduation (NCCIC).

Although quality services are necessary for producing short-term and long-term benefits, national studies rate most center-based and family care as poor to mediocre (NCCIC).

Central to this problem of quality is a child care staffing crisis in which low compensation results in high staff turnover and an undereducated workforce. Nationally, as in Utah, there are many barriers to recruiting and retaining the level and type of child care workforce needed to produce a high quality child care system: low wages and limited benefits, high staff turnover rates, low professional esteem, difficulty recruiting trained staff, and few opportunities for training and career advancement (Hudson, 1994). Research shows that:

- Children in programs with high staff turnover rates tend to be less proficient in language and social skills than those who had the benefit of more consistent care (Whitebook, et al. 2001). A survey of center directors for this study indicates that compensation and benefits are the top two reasons for center staff changing jobs or leaving the child care field. In Utah, the turnover rate is 31%. Although this is roughly the same as the national average, it is clearly too high.
- Child care staff with more education, particularly college-level education and child development training, provide better quality care (Vandell, 2000). Providers with higher levels of education are more consistent, sensitive, and appropriate in their dealings with children (Whitebook, et al., 2001). A survey of centers for this study indicates that nearly half of teachers at centers had achieved not more than a high school diploma, with fewer than 8% earning a Bachelor's degree or higher. Of family providers, 33% had achieved not more than a high school diploma, with 12% earning a Bachelor's degree or higher.

While the connection between wages and quality and recruitment and retention has been firmly established (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989; Whitebook & Eichberg, 2002), compensation is still remarkably low, both nationally and in Utah. The estimated hourly wage for child care workers in Utah is \$7.90 per hour, roughly on par with parking lot attendants and food preparers, and lower than that of file clerks (\$9.20), bus drivers (\$11.50), and tour guides (\$9.80) (Utah Department of Workforce Services, 2002). Figures in this study reflect those findings. Interviews conducted for this report with the career centers at universities and colleges in Utah confirm that inadequate salary and benefits were deemed inadequate and a substantial barrier to graduates entering the field.

Program accreditation is frequently used as another indicator of quality in child care programs as well as a benchmark for improving the overall quality of child care systems. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the largest organization of early childhood professionals in the United States, "Accreditation is a powerful tool... It provides a process through which early childhood professionals and families can evaluate programs, compare them with professional standards, strengthen the program and commit to ongoing evaluation and improvement" (NAEYC). To earn accreditation, a center or program must meet criteria that address all aspects of quality in the areas of health, safety, staff qualifications, classroom environment, learning

programs, and children's activities. The survey of centers for this report indicated that 15% were NAEYC accredited, with 27% working on accreditation. The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation standards cover the following content areas: relationships, environment, activities, developmental learning goals, safety and health, and professional and business practices (NAFCC). The survey of family providers indicated that 3% were NAFCC accredited, with 17% working on accreditation.

To help solve problems of quality, Utah has joined a growing number of states that are seeking to improve the care children receive by improving the training and professional development of child care workers. Toward this end, the Office of Child Care has implemented three programs:

- 1.) The Early Childhood Career Ladder, which “recognizes and rewards early childhood workers for 10 possible levels of training in child development and child care”.
- 2.) The Provider Achievement Award, which annually recognizes providers for “their achievements during the previous year in three areas, years of licensed experience, compliance with licensing regulations, and level of Career Ladder certification”.
- 3.) A Scholarship and Accreditation program to assist providers “in obtaining and renewing their Child Development Associate credential, and becoming nationally accredited” (Utah Office of Child Care, 2002).

While research supports the idea that increased opportunities for training and development are associated with better rates of recruitment and retention, research also indicates that this effect is minimal without a direct link to increased compensation (De Vita, 2001, Whitebook, 2002).

While there is work being done to improve current programs, demographic trends indicate that the need for child care in Utah will continue to rise. One analyst warned that Utah “now stands on the brink of a dramatic increase in young households” (Wood, 2001). U.S. Census figures show a 29.6% increase in the state’s population from 1990–2000 with a 9.4% increase in the number of children under five years old (U.S. Census Bureau). Both rates are well above the national averages. Also contributing to a greater demand is Utah’s changing work patterns and family makeup. Census figures show an increasing percentage of two parents in the labor force and of women entering full-time work in Utah. Single parenting has also become more prevalent, with more than 40,000 households with children under 18 in Utah headed by single mothers. Roughly one-third of these families live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Just as the demand for child care is expected to increase, so is the need for child care workers. According to the Utah Department of Workforce Services, the child care industry is projected to be the tenth largest producer of new jobs in the state from 2000–2005, with the addition of 2,590 new jobs (Utah Department of Workforce Services, 2001).

While the federal and state governments share the cost of child care with parents through subsidies, tax provisions, and quality initiatives, child care is expensive—typically it is a family’s fourth largest expense after housing, food, and taxes (Hudson, 1994). In all 50 states, the cost for full-time care in urban areas exceeds that of tuition at a public college, and in Utah this was also true for the six rural counties studied (Schulman, 2000).

At the same time that parents pay more for child care than for state college tuition, they also pay a far larger portion of the actual expense. Tuition paid by parents at public universities and state colleges accounts for only 23% of total revenues, while tuition at child care accounts for 60% of the total revenues (Mitchell, Stoney & Dichter, 1997). In effect, the government is subsidizing higher education at a far greater rate than early education. This gap is significant because young families are least able to afford the expense. Economists and educators see this discrepancy as an economic justification for a substantially greater public investment in child care and early education (Vandell, 2000).

In recognition of this situation, many states have followed the federal government’s use of tax codes to help young families defray the high cost of child care. This assistance enables families to better meet their employment-related expenses, and purchase higher quality care. A recent study that examined state use of child and dependent care income tax provisions gave Utah a failing grade (Donahue, 2002).

Unfortunately, because child care is so expensive, parents often settle for less costly care that offers fewer developmental benefits, and, in fact, may be harmful to their child’s development. The negative consequences of these decisions are likely to have far-reaching impacts on society as a whole. When an adequate supply of affordable quality care is available, parents can work, employers can fill jobs, people can move off of welfare rolls, the tax base can grow, and children can thrive. When the supply is inadequate, the growth of our children, our families, and our economy is stunted.

The Utah Office of Child Care has a powerful vision statement in which “quality, affordable child care is available to every child in Utah who needs it.” While Utah is working in this direction, Lynette Rasmussen, the Office of Child Care Director, states that “*the capacity and quality of our system of early care and education is not meeting the needs of families, employers, or child care providers.*” Utah and the Office of Child Care are to be commended for undertaking this study, which provides recommendations to develop a comprehensive child care system in Utah and improve the quality of child care across the state. In order to move toward this goal it must be recognized that, as Ms. Rasmussen notes, “*quality care must be provided with enough funding to do so without increasing the cost paid by parents*” (Utah Office of Child Care, 2002). In Utah and nationwide, addressing child care challenges is not inexpensive; however, the costs of taking no action is far greater and will affect not only our children and families, but our society at large.

The purpose of this research is to provide the Office of Child Care with an analysis of Utah's child care workforce and to serve as the basis for recommendations that address the issues of the recruitment, retention, and compensation of the child care labor force. The study includes:

- A statewide survey of child care providers, including residential certificate holders, licensed family and group providers, licensed child care centers, school-aged child care programs, and legally license exempt providers
- A collection of baseline data defining Utah's child care workforce
- An identification and analysis of the barriers that challenge recruitment, retention and compensation of Utah's child care provides and the enhancements that can improve the situation
- Recommendations for both short- and long-term strategies to promote retention of Utah's child care providers, and to involve public and private sectors in supporting and sustaining an environment that encourages the choice of a career in child care

The research design included multiple methods of data collection and analysis. Primary data were collected through a statewide survey of all child care and school-age programs and a sampling of family child care providers and residential certificate holders. Other data were collected from a variety of sources in Utah and nationally through telephone interviews, focus groups, and the review of existing research. Taken as a whole, the findings from this study present a snapshot of Utah's child care labor force and provide a starting point for creating future workforce initiatives.

This study was conducted as a collaborative effort by Mills Consulting Group, Inc. and Goodman Research Group, Inc. The study began in February 2002 and was completed in August 2002.

To address the objectives identified by the Utah Office of Child Care and to provide a comprehensive analysis of the child care workforce, the following primary methods were applied in the collection of data:

- A statewide survey of all licensed child care centers, school-age child care programs, and legally license exempt providers, and a sampling of residential certificate holders and licensed family and group providers
- Research on other states' recruitment and retention initiatives
- Telephone interviews with leading national child care organizations
- Telephone interviews with a selection of Utah family child care providers and center directors
- Telephone interviews with state and national universities and colleges, employment agencies, and potential employers

Supplemental research was conducted through focus groups with Utah center directors and teachers, and through a questionnaire completed by Utah child care resource and referral directors.

### **Survey development**

Mills Consulting Group, Inc., in conjunction with Goodman Research Group, Inc., reviewed and discussed previous provider survey tools they had developed, and solicited feedback from the Utah Office of Child Care. Two separate survey tools were developed, one tailored for center-based, school-age and legally license exempt programs (see Appendix A) and another tailored for family child care providers and residential certificate holders (see Appendix B).

The survey instruments consist primarily of pre-coded multiple choice, numeric and yes/no questions. Based on input from the pilot survey conducted with providers, additional questions regarding primary language other than English spoken and race were added to gather information on both families served and program staff. All questions were constructed to make responding as easy as possible. Questions were written on a sixth-grade reading level to accommodate literacy differences in the provider population.

The categories of survey questions included: (1) demographics by age, gender, ethnicity, location, program enrollment, and accreditation status, (2) educational and professional development, (3) experience and career information and, (4) benefits and compensation. The category on experience and career information included questions on why and when

individuals began in the field of child care, how long they intended to continue, and what they perceive to be the occupational challenges.

### **Pilot testing**

During the pilot test period, input was sought from the Office of Child Care and from child care programs and providers. With assistance from Chris Bray of the Metro Resource and Referral, Mills Consulting Group conducted a pilot test of the survey tools with two groups of providers and programs from the Salt Lake City area. Each participant was given a stipend for attending. The two groups were run simultaneously and represented a distribution of urban and rural, non-profit programs, for-profit programs, public school programs, licensed family child care providers, and residential certificate holders. Focus group participants served children from various age groups.

Participants were given time to read through the questions, write down comments and then share those comments in a group discussion. Each survey question was evaluated for clarity and relevance. Revisions were subsequently made to the survey tools and the Office of Child Care then made a final review of the survey tool.

### **Development of the sample**

The survey sample was comprised of all child care centers, school-age programs, and legally license exempt programs. Due to the large number of residential certificate holders and licensed family child care providers, a stratified random sample was comprised of approximately one-half of the individuals in these two groups. The sample was stratified based upon the providers' geographic location.

### **Promotional efforts**

The Office of Child Care sent a letter to all providers prior to the survey mailing. This letter announced the purpose and scheduling of the survey process and introduced Mills Consulting Group to the providers. The letter also stressed the importance of the survey and encouraged participation from all providers. (See Appendices C and D.)

Mills Consulting Group prepared an article for dissemination to the resource and referral agencies in Utah, which was put into their local newsletters (see Appendix E). The article announced the upcoming survey and encouraged participation by all providers. The resource and referral agencies were also asked to discuss the survey at their upcoming meetings with providers and when updating their provider files.



## **Incentive program**

To encourage participation by all providers, survey incentives were developed. Providers were informed in their survey cover letters that those who submitted their surveys by the deadline date were entered into a drawing for gift certificates from Lakeshore Learning Materials (see Appendices F and G). A total of six providers, three family-based and three center-based, were drawn as prize winners, and each received a certificate for \$250 to purchase educational items for their programs.

## **Distribution of surveys**

In April 2002, a total of 1,415 surveys were sent to all child care centers, school-age programs, and legally license exempt programs, and to the sample of residential certificate holders and licensed family child care providers. On April 26<sup>th</sup> a second survey was sent to those programs and providers that were still providing care but did not respond to the initial mailing.

## **Collection and tracking of surveys**

As the surveys were returned, tracking numbers identifying each provider were entered into a database. Survey responses included 44% child care programs (199 of the 457) and 62% child care providers (594 of the 958). An additional 26 surveys from child care programs and 17 surveys from child care providers arrived after the May 28<sup>th</sup> deadline and were not included in the database. Forty-nine percent of the center-based surveys and 63% of the provider surveys were returned.

To increase the rate of response, telephone calls were made to all non-respondents by the Utah resource and referral agencies and Mills Consulting Group during the last week in April. In total, 880 telephone calls were made to non-respondents. The number of phone calls made for each service area is as follows: Metro (394), Northern (167), Mountainland (134), Western (99), Bridgerland (42), and Eastern (44). The two resource and referral agencies with the highest survey response rates were Eastern (76%) and Western (63%).

## Findings and Recommendations

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The findings presented in this section represent both the analysis of the research conducted for this study and a set of challenges and opportunities for improving Utah's child care system. The recommended strategies, while informed by successful initiatives in other states, have been tailored to suit Utah's specific circumstances. The suggested initiatives focus on improving Utah's child care workforce and the quality, accessibility, and affordability of child care services. Findings and recommendations have been presented in the following areas:

- Wages and Benefits
- Recruitment and Retention
- Provider Education
- Professional Recognition
- Child Care Supply
- Accreditation

In planning a course of action, Utah must begin by defining a set of long-term goals that support the development of a strong child care infrastructure. Short-term needs can then be addressed within the context of achieving these goals.

Utah can look toward the increasing number of states that have had the vision to design comprehensive child care systems that address both short-term needs and long-term goals. While smaller steps are implemented in conjunction with larger initiatives, all program developments support the goal of creating a purposeful infrastructure.

The most common element in these comprehensive programs is a coordinated career development system that addresses the child care workforce issues of education, recruitment and retention, and professional recognition. While these programs move us in the right direction, ultimately, the experience of other states as well as numerous research studies show that creating and sustaining a quality workforce and child care system will require provider wages of a professional level. Long-term planning must account for the fact that quality child care services cannot be delivered by an underpaid, undereducated workforce with high turnover rates and low morale.

To address the issues of affordability, access, and quality within the findings of this report, Utah should seek state approval for creating a strong early care and education system (this includes care for infants through school-age children). Only with significant financial and policy support from the state can this goal be achieved.

## **Wages and Benefits**

### ***Compensation for child care is low and benefits are limited***

- The lowest average hourly wage in a center is \$6.81 for a teacher and \$6.20 for an assistant
- The highest average hourly wage in a center is \$8.67 for a teacher and \$6.98 for an assistant
- The average weekly net income for a family provider is \$240.45 for a 49-hour work week (at \$4.90/hour), and for a residential certificate holder is \$165.75 for a 44-hour work week (at \$3.65/hour)
- The average hourly wage for family child care assistants is \$6.41 and \$6.33 for residential certificate holder assistants
- In some cases, hourly wages were below the federal minimum wage. This was found for the lowest average wage for teachers in one county and for the average hourly wage for family provider assistants in five counties.
- Most family child care providers lack basic benefits. Only 19% get paid for holidays (81% do not get paid holidays), 6% have paid personal days (94% do not), and only 1% get paid professional development time (99% do not). Fewer residential certificate holders receive these benefits than do family care providers.
- Many full-time center classroom staff lack basic benefits. Slightly more than half (53%) receive paid holidays (47% do not), 63% receive paid vacation time (37% do not), 52% receive sick time/personal days (48% do not), and only 39% receive professional development days/time (61% do not). Fewer part-time center classroom staff receive these benefits than full-time staff.
- Survey respondents cited compensation and benefits as the two main reasons for staff changing jobs or leaving the field. More than three-quarters of respondents (82%) cited pay and more than half (61%) cited benefits as reasons they believe child care staff leave the field entirely. About three-quarters (72%) cited pay and more than half (56%) cited benefits to explain why they believe child care staff change jobs but remain in the field.
- No more than 5% of family providers and residential certificate holders have health or dental insurance through their child care business. While roughly two-thirds have access to health insurance through their spouse or a government program, for almost one-third this benefit is either not affordable or not available.
- About one in four full-time center classroom staff receive health insurance through their job. While 58% have health insurance from another source, nearly one in five

(19%) lack health insurance. For part-time staff, only 3% have health insurance through their job and 22% do not have health insurance.

- Utah college and university career service officials stated that low salaries and lack of benefits in child care positions make it very difficult for graduates to pay off student loans and earn a livable wage
- Utah state tax policy does not aid parents in paying for child care, even though it is typically an employment-related expense. One result of this policy is a difficulty in paying the child care workforce a salary in accordance with their education and skills.

## **Recommendation**

### ***Mobilize public support and increase public awareness of the benefits from supporting quality child care programs***

- Create a public relations campaign with multiple prongs, emphasizing:
  - Quality care and education is good for young children
  - People who care for and educate our youngest population are professionals
  - Respect is critical for those who care for and educate young children
  - Working with young children to provide care and education is a worthy career goal
- Build a strong and diverse constituency, including specific early care and education (includes care for infants through school-age children) advocacy groups. The business community has had a powerful effect in a number of states through advocacy groups.
- Design a campaign by UACCRRA and child care resource and referral agencies to let parents know which state candidates support better child care in Utah. Child care providers can serve as a link for disseminating information to parents.
- UACCRRA and child care resource and referral agencies should initiate and support grassroots lobbying initiatives by parents such as letter writing and phone call campaigns to legislators whenever a vote on child care comes up, especially regarding parent voucher and wage increases for providers.

## **Recommendation**

### ***Improve the compensation of child care workers in Utah***

- The Office of Child Care should work with legislators, advocates, providers, and the general public to help child care worker wages come more into line with public school teacher wages

- Encourage employers to become partners in a child care system by:
  - Setting up quality care centers for employees
  - Subsidizing care that parent employees choose
  - Collaborating with other employers to initiate a model center in their community
- Institute tax incentives for businesses that make child care more affordable and accessible to their employees
- Institute a personal income tax deduction and/or tax credit for employment-related child care expenses. When parents can purchase higher quality care, wages and benefits can be increased.
- In addition to a tax credit and refund for using child care, add a higher tax credit to recognize the choice of a quality child care program (i.e. an accredited program)
- Child care resource and referral agencies should encourage child care providers to institute paid holidays and vacations for staff. CCR&Rs should work with the entire child care worker population to bring about this change, as many providers make decisions based on what others are doing.
- Increase the amount of professional development program awards and bonuses
- Provide significant wage supplements based on levels of education and experience

## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase child care provider access to health insurance***

- Investigate the idea of allowing child care workers access to the state health care insurance plan
- Offer subsidized state health insurance to providers who meet specified quality criteria and to those serving a specified percentage of voucher placements
- Advertise to child care workers state health insurance for low income wage earners
- Set up a state child care association or go through UACCRRA in order to leverage lower health care premiums

## **Recommendation**

### ***Consider rates and policies regarding child care subsidies***

- Adjust subsidy rates to recognize additional hours in care above a set minimum

- Adjust subsidy rates to acknowledge the accreditation status of programs

## **Recruitment and Retention**

***Utah child care programs face workforce problems due to difficulty in recruiting and retaining child care workers, particularly appropriately educated workers.***

- Utah centers reported a turnover rate of 31% for the previous year
- Of center staff reported as leaving their position, 38% left the field entirely; for an additional 35% who left their position, it was unknown if they remained in the child care workforce
- The Utah Department of Workforce Services projects the addition of 2,590 new child care worker positions from the years 2000–2005
- Teachers in a focus group reported that “finding quality staff” was a challenge for the field and that the turnover rate “frustrates parents, providers, and children”
- Two-thirds of center directors in a focus group cited “high staff turnover” as a challenge. They noted that the limited pay and lack of benefits are primary reasons for turnover.
- Utah college and university career services offices stated that low wages and the lack of benefits discourage their graduates from entering the field. Inadequate pay and benefits were also noted as an obstacle toward retaining good providers.
- Interviews and research from national organizations cite turnover as a significant workforce problem and point to pay and benefits as the primary obstacles in recruitment and retention of child care workers

## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase and diversify recruitment efforts***

- Implement a program to connect child care programs looking for staff with college placement offices
- Encourage high schools to offer additional early care and education classes in order to stimulate interest in the child care field. Students can work in local child care programs for credit and experience.
- Implement a recruitment campaign geared to mothers who want to re-enter the workforce and might consider child care as a profession

- Create a public awareness campaign emphasizing the projected demand for child care workers as well as the educational and incentive programs for entering the field
- Encourage the Office of Child Care to work with the TANF office regarding the advantages of being a child care provider

## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase efforts to retain child care providers***

- Encourage the Office of Child Care to work with colleges regarding the needs of the child care field in relation to the courses being offered
- Encourage the Office of Child Care to work with the college career counseling departments regarding placing students in the field

## **Recommendation**

### ***Support initiatives for improving the educational opportunities, wages, and benefits for child care providers***

- Establish a fund that provides wage supplements to child care workers based on longevity and education

## **Provider Education**

### ***Most child care providers do not have either a college education or a degree in early childhood or a related field***

- Nearly half (46%) of center classroom teachers and nearly two-thirds (64%) of teacher assistants in Utah have, at most, a high school diploma or GED
- One-third (33%) of family providers and 42% of residential certificate holders have, at most, a high school diploma or GED
- While a small percentage of teachers hold an Associate's degree (12% of family child care providers, 11% of residential certificate holders, 8% of center teachers) or a Bachelor's degree or higher (12% of family care providers, 9% of residential certificate holders, 12% of center teachers), their degrees were rarely in a field related to child care
- State licensing does not set minimum requirements for child care workers

- State support for encouraging further education is limited. For example, financial incentives for moving up the Career Ladder are low, and there is not coverage for providers who want to attend classes or conferences.
- Family child care providers cited the need for substitute coverage in order to attend trainings

## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase opportunities, access, and support for provider education and training***

- Resource and referral agencies should work closely with the local colleges to help them understand the training needs of providers
- Colleges should establish articulation agreements to enable providers to complete a degree
- Create a training registry for providers. This will track the trainings providers have taken and what they need in order to receive a degree.
- Establish a statewide mentoring program. Mentors could work for child care resource and referral agencies.
- Establish a substitute program that would enable providers to attend classes and professional development activities
- Make early childhood education courses more accessible to providers who are not located near resource and referral agencies or colleges. This may be accomplished by distance learning courses through the Internet, by beaming in classes being taught at colleges to a local site, and by the use of training programs that can be adapted for informal settings, such those used in North and South Dakota.
- Establish minimum requirements for child care workers
- Encourage The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to offer early childhood education classes to its members
- Establish classes on leadership and business skills and encourage providers to enroll
- Build an infrastructure that supports the professional development of the child care workforce by coordinating training activities, such as classes and development activities, with support programs, such as the provision of substitutes, a training registry, and financial incentives



## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase financial support and incentives for greater child care education***

- Implement a loan forgiveness program. For example, students who enroll in two- or four-year early care and education programs would have their loan forgiven if they work in the field for a minimum of three years after completing their degree.
- Link salary increases to the education of the provider
- Increase the Career Ladder money currently given to providers
- Subsidize release time for professional development

## **Professional Recognition**

### ***There is a lack of professional recognition and respect for child care workers from parents and the general public***

- Research from national organizations cite the lack of professional recognition as a pervasive problem, including a lack of voice in policy making, lack of influence in their jobs, and a lack of respect and value from society
- In Utah, approximately half of center directors (52%), family child care providers (54%), and residential certificate holders (44%) reported lack of professional respect as an occupational challenge
- Teachers in a focus group reported that they were not perceived as professionals and were not taken seriously by parents
- Interviewees at Utah college and university career service offices stated that the public perception of child care work is “less than professional”
- More than half of the family child care providers interviewed cited a lack of respect from parents as a key occupational challenge

## **Recommendation**

### ***Improve the public perception of child care as a profession and educate the public on the value of quality care and caregivers***

- Conduct a public relations campaign that emphasizes:
  - The importance of quality child care and early education
  - The importance of child care workers in creating quality care

- UACCRRA, resource and referral agencies, and the Office of Child Care should work with providers to educate parents on the important role of child care workers. This can be done through written material and public service announcements.

## **Recommendation**

### ***Improve the profession of child care***

- Implement programs that increase the wages, benefits, and education of providers. Improving the profession will not only increase quality, but will also improve recognition and respect

## **Child Care Supply**

### ***There is a need for a greater supply of child care providers, in particular for infant and toddler care***

- Approximately half of programs accept infants (48%) and toddlers (55%), compared to 86% that accept three year olds and 90% that accept four and five year olds
- Resource and referral agencies reported that parents had difficulty in finding quality care for infants and toddlers. They stated that parents removed their infants and toddlers from care due to dissatisfaction.
- Demographic trends in Utah (growing numbers of children under five, families with both parents in the labor force, and single parents) indicate that the demand for child care will continue to rise

## **Recommendation**

### ***Encourage providers to offer infant/toddler care or to expand their existing capacity for care***

- Provide financial support for offering or expanding infant and toddler care services

## **Recommendation**

### ***Improve the quality of infant and toddler care***

- Have OCC Infant/Toddler Specialists serve as mentors to new and experienced child care providers on the importance of quality infant/toddler care

## **Accreditation**

### ***The percentage of accredited programs is low***

- National studies have consistently rated accredited programs as providing higher quality care than non-accredited programs
- In Utah, staff at accredited centers have slightly higher hourly wages and annual salaries than those at centers that are not accredited
- Fifteen percent of centers are currently accredited (7% are NAEYC, 7% are NCCA, and 1% are NSACA accredited), with an additional 27% working on accreditation (7% are working on NAEYC, 7% on NCCA, and 1% on NSACA accreditation)
- 3% of family providers are currently accredited through NAFCC, with an additional 17% working on accreditation
- 2% of residential certificate holders are currently accredited through NAFCC, with an additional 6% working on accreditation

## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase the financial support and incentives for program accreditation***

- Increase voucher rate for placements in accredited programs
- Provide incentives such as credentialing bonuses and links between credentials and levels of compensation

## **Recommendation**

### ***Increase demand for accredited programs***

- Heighten providers' awareness of the financial advantages of becoming accredited
- Increase public awareness of accreditation and quality standards. If parents are informed about the benefits of accreditation, the demand for accredited programs will increase.