

Speakers: Mom and dad can't work without day care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

There's no question there are some high quality day care providers in Wapello County. But without at least 1,000 more slots, the community risks losing good-paying jobs to cities with a higher percentage of child care providers.

"You don't necessarily think of day care as a county government issue," said Brian Morgan, chair of the Wapello County Board of Supervisors. "But this was interesting: It's as much a county issue as gravel roads."

"It's not just a family issue," agreed Brenda O'Halloran of Child Care Resource and Referral. "It's a workforce issue."

Morgan was attending a seminar on what parents often refer to day care — knowing someone

trustworthy will be looking out for their child while they are at work. The seminar Tuesday morning did discuss the importance of quality child care: Providing a learning environment, or play or socialization, good nutrition.

But the wider revelation appeared to be that investors considering where to establish their next business venture want to know if they'll have enough employees to fill that expensive, advanced manufacturing facility.

Pat McReynolds of the Mahaska Wapello branch of Early Childhood Iowa introduced experts from around the state. The general consensus, however, came from an employer on a short video that started the seminar.

How is it we have good-paying job openings at our company that we're begging to be filled? But at the same time, how is it there are people sitting at home saying they want to work a good-paying job — and we can't connect?

The empty jobs are there, waiting, and the potential workforce isn't. Studies have shown in Wapello County, at least, increasing access to affordable, high-quality child care, could resolve that situation.

"Businesses [considering opening a facility] need to know they will have a sufficient workforce," said McReynolds. "To do that requires parents to be able to work."

In 2012, there were 1,734 spots for kids in day care. In 2018, there are less: 1,400 seats. Unable to make a living, missing out on health insurance or just retiring with no one to take their place, home day care providers are leaving the child care business.

The Iowa Department of Human Services estimates there are 4,000 children of working parents in Wapello County.

Parents who don't make enough money to justify paying for day care are making the decision to stay home with the kids.

Those two factors: Difficulty affording child care and no open spots are the number one and two top reasons cited by parents for not being able to get care.

DHS estimates 50 percent of all children go without quality day care. However, parents may find a babysitter, a family member, or make sacrifices themselves: Sometimes, to care for the kids, parents will work opposite shifts, husband and wife seeing one another only in the driveway.

That may end up causing one trained, valued employee to quit, said Dawn Oliver Wiand, executive director of the Iowa Women's Foundation. In fact, two-thirds of Iowa parents will, due to child care issues every month, be late to work, need to rush off early or miss the entire day twice.

And if you have a large company, you'll find most of your employees tend to be parents. In Iowa, 75 percent of children 6 and under have both parents working.

Wiand calls child care-related work benefits a valuable perk not just for the employee, but for any business "looking to grow and sustain a reliable workforce."

Supervisor Morgan called the child care seminar on Tuesday a collection of ways to step forward in the development of local economic growth.

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