

Child care industry is experiencing workforce issues too ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Workers are getting called back to the office, school is starting and federal unemployment benefits are expiring. That's all putting pressure on parents to find child care.

"High-quality, affordable child care is kind of like those word problems you did in fifth grade. That math never adds up," Jill Marini, director of Early Learning for the YWCA, said.

Marini said they are interviewing for teaching positions, but it's a job seekers market.

"In order to pay your staff what they're worth you really would have to charge parents more than they can afford," Marini said.

Marini said as a woman with a master's degree and 20 years of experience is not going to be willing to work for \$20 an hour.

"You don't just want a warm body in there. You want somebody who is really good at what they do," Marini said.

Connecticut is offering a back-to-work credit for anyone who gets off unemployment.

"If people are taking advantage of getting a job right now while it's a job seekers market and having that job for a minimum of eight weeks they are still eligible and there is an opportunity for them to receive the \$1,000 back to work bonus," Acting Labor Commissioner Dante Bartolomeo said.

There are vacancies at both child care centers and homes.

"We've lost about 1.4% of the centers in the state over the pandemic but predictions were we could have lost up to 30 to 40%," Beth Bye, executive director of the Office of Early Child Care, said.

Bye is the executive director of the Office of Early Childhood and a former child care provider.

"It doesn't mean these programs aren't still struggling -- they are -- and they're having a super hard time getting staff," Bye said.

"There was a crisis before the pandemic and like everyone with a lower-wage worker job -- child care is a lower-wage job -- it's hard to fill the spots," she said.

That's not to say they haven't been using federal funds to fill in the gaps.

"We just put out \$120 million to programs across the state to help them maintain their programs and capacity," Bye explained.

She said some of the additional funding will be used on staff, but centers are hesitant to use one-time funding to boost salaries.

"There are classrooms closed across the state because there aren't enough teachers, so we're working on solutions to that," Bye said.

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