

# Bring on school-aged care <sup>[1]</sup>

Can we create a seamless melding of early child care and school-aged care?

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts

Child care needs don't end when children walk into the first day of kindergarten. The school year and school day are still laughably mismatched with most Americans' working schedules (not, contrary to popular belief, because of the agrarian calendar!). Yet the child care conversation is dominated by the early years. Linking early child care and school-aged care is a good idea both on the merits and the politics.

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Philosophically, it makes little sense to overly segment the early years when talking about care. Certainly child care needs are most intense and expensive prior to school entry; those seven hours a day for 180 days a year aren't nothing! But families do not experience care needs in a vacuum: a household that has found an affordable slot for their toddler but can't afford care for their second grader is still under stress.

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Politically, bringing in parents of elementary schoolers massively expands the child care constituency. While there are around 20 million children under the age of five, not all of them belong to families that utilize external child care. (Stay-at-home parents should be brought into the coalition as well, but that's a story for another column!) More than three million are infants, and parents of babies are not famously known for having a lot of discretionary time or energy. On the other hand, there are over 35 million elementary school students in the U.S. with less bleary-eyed parents. [1] 10 million currently attend an after-school program, another 20 million would if one was available and affordable, and the vast majority have summer care needs.

Why hasn't there been more of a seamless melding of early child care and school-aged care? To find out, I asked Joan Lombardi, a child care luminary who has held top child care roles in the federal government and has been fighting for decades toward a better system. Lombardi told me over email that "I don't think there is any one point in history that marked a clear separation, but it did seem slowly over time these issues diverged somewhat."

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** child care <sup>[4]</sup>

school-age <sup>[5]</sup>

accessibility <sup>[6]</sup>

affordability <sup>[7]</sup>

policy <sup>[8]</sup>

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