

Investigating how kids are harmed by lower child care standards

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Excerpts

Having covered the child care industry for nearly a decade and experienced the ins and outs of different types of care with my own two sons, I thought I had seen just about everything. But a little over a year ago, I came across a news story that stopped me in my tracks. In an attempt to address child care shortages, lawmakers in Wisconsin were proposing putting teenagers as young as 16 in classrooms as teachers, potentially in charge of group sizes that would be larger than ever before.

As I dug into Wisconsin’s efforts, I found it wasn’t the only state proposing to loosen regulations, increase staff-to-child ratios or pare down training requirements. A quiet wave of deregulation seemed to be sweeping across the country, masquerading as a solution to child care staffing woes.

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Deregulation advocates say removing some of the rules could make it easier for programs to operate and help get teachers into classrooms more quickly. That would theoretically allow programs to take in more children. (And many child care directors and experts can certainly point to regulations around paperwork or zoning that are burdensome and don’t directly change the experience for children.)

But the push to deregulate didn’t address the challenges I was hearing about from providers. They needed more funding, higher salaries, support dealing with challenging child behavior and professional respect – not less. Raising group sizes and ratios, in particular, will hinder a teacher’s ability to give each child ample attention and support, educators and experts told me, something that is especially critical during the first pivotal years of brain development.

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