

Women at work: Good child care takes good care of the economy [US-KA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ask any working parents about the value of good child care and they'll tell you they can't live without it.

Child care, especially high-quality care, prepares children for school and life and enables parents to work.

What most people don't realize is that it also has a huge impact on the current and future economy of a state, according to a report released in March by the Mid-America Regional Council.

Child care is a half-billion-dollar industry in Kansas, according to the report "Investing in the Child Care Industry: An Economic Development Strategy for Kansas."

Child care is a key component of the economic development of the state. It not only enables Kansans to go to work, it also creates jobs and prepares the future work force.

Regulated child care establishments currently serve more than 100,000 Kansas children. They also employ more than 14,000 workers -- about as many as the state's hotel industry and important agricultural industries.

A significant finding of the report is the ripple effect that child care investments have on the economy.

Public funds spent in Kansas on child care draw new federal funds into the state. Each state dollar invested leverages roughly \$3 in federal funds, according to the report.

Each new federal dollar then generates an additional \$1.98 in economic activity in the state. That means there is a net impact of nearly \$5 for every \$1 Kansas spends on child care in Kansas, according to the report.

One of the greatest effect of good care is the effect it has on preparing children for school and eventually the work force.

Research on early care and education has found that good programs boost reading and math scores and reduce the need for special education. Experts know that an economy can't grow without skilled, educated employees.

Research has estimated that for every \$1 spent on good child care, there is a \$7 return.

Long-term research also has shown that children who attend high-quality early childhood programs have higher earnings as adults. They also are less reliant on social services.

Publicly financed care benefits the economy as well as families and businesses, especially small businesses and those in service and retail sectors that pay wages that are not enough to cover the cost of care.

Kansas, like most states, faces a dire economic situation. But it needs to recognize that cutting child care financing doesn't make business sense.

Publicly financed subsidies pay for themselves by enabling families to work. They also provide essential services to families and employers.

- reprinted from the Kansas City Star

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