

Cheap child care makes only an illusion of savings ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Child care on the cheap does not lead to educated children! A new report by the staff of the Legislative Finance Committee on the state of child care in New Mexico makes this absolutely clear.

New Mexico's child care system is a very under-resourced system. Designed to support poor working families who earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, the state has set low standards and has provided low reimbursement rates to programs that struggle, with few resources, to provide good quality. It is no surprise, then, that we are getting poor educational results.

You get what you pay for.

Positive outcomes for children are achieved when there are high quality services for children and families - and high quality costs money.

This is not new information. Years of research show positive returns when significant investment is made in high quality services, which include committed, well-educated teachers and programs that invite parents to be active leaders in their children's education.

Continuing to provide minimal support for child care services will keep New Mexico right where it is - at the lowest rankings of child well-being.

It is absolutely true, as the Journal's Sunday editorial points out, that New Mexico needs to spend more wisely, and that our children deserve real investments in their education that translate into literacy, employability and self-sufficiency.

It is important now to focus on where child care is headed and where it can go with more and well-targeted support, resources and accountability.

Child care in New Mexico has been successful in achieving its goals to support low-income working parents to work and go to school. Further, early childhood education is vital to economic development in the state.

Now, what is needed is to:

- Reframe goals of the subsidized child care system into a revitalized educational service, which supports all children to develop to their fullest potential through high-quality programs and a social service, which supports families to work.
- Raise standards for programs that receive funds for children receiving subsidy and support and ensure that the early childhood education programs receiving those funds meet the standards.
- Pay early childhood education programs that meet those standards subsidy rates that support quality.
- Target teacher education and compensation, to ensure well-educated teachers with the necessary knowledge and best skills are teaching young children from families receiving subsidies.
- Start with both higher standards and higher rates for infants and toddlers, where the foundation for success in school and life begins.
- Identify and support model programs with special grants to demonstrate what high quality looks like in New Mexico's rural and very culturally and linguistically diverse state.

Starting with high quality programs for children at age four is often too late. It is essential to start early - providing high quality infant and toddler child care in centers and homes - for those children whose parents work.

If we are to change outcomes for children in New Mexico, we must start with babies, with home visiting and with high quality infant and toddler care, with high standards for teacher education and program quality.

We see hints of what is possible in the educational gains children make in New Mexico PreK, where added support to 4-year-olds in participating child care centers and public schools makes a difference long-term, as the study showed. With a more comprehensive system, for children birth to 5, the gains could be huge.

New Mexico's Children Youth and Families Department is to be commended for the FOCUS program, which brings quality supports to child care. This and other pilot projects investigating how to bring quality to child care must be encouraged and funded.

We must do better with child outcomes. We must do better for our children.

-reprinted from the Albuquerque Journal

Region: United States ^[2]

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