

Child Care & Afterschool: A Continuum of Care Supporting Two Generations in California

High-quality programs help prepare children for success while their parents work



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2/3 of California children have parents in the workforce

The majority of California children live in households in which all parents work, making high-quality child care and afterschool programs essential for parents, children, and our state. Parents need these services to be able to go to work and support their families. Employers benefit when parents have the peace of mind they need to be productive, reliable employees. Quality child care and afterschool programs support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, setting them on a path to success in school and careers, and away from crime. These programs can also help youth qualify for military service, if they so choose, by addressing factors (poor academic performance, crime, substance use, and obesity) that currently prevent 71 percent of California youth from qualifying.

However, too many California children lack access to affordable, quality child care and afterschool options and COVID-19 has

exacerbated this situation. Further, both the child care and afterschool systems suffer from low reimbursement rates and

“As a matter of national security, sustained investments in child care and afterschool programs are essential for California.”



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inadequate staff compensation. To ensure a continuum of age-appropriate care, California policymakers should work to align reimbursement rates, staffing ratios, and staff training requirements between child care and afterschool programs. Support for high-quality child care and afterschool programs is an investment in California's economic well-being and public safety, and our nation's security.

Most California parents are in the workforce and need child care and afterschool programs

Nearly four million California children, which is about two-thirds (64 percent) of those under age 6 and the same percentage of those ages 6 to 12, have all parents working outside the home.¹ Thus, many families need child care and afterschool programs.

California's child care and afterschool systems do not meet the needs of children, families, educators, or employers

Several interrelated challenges render these systems less than optimal:

- **Access:** Prior to the pandemic, more than half (60 percent) of Californians lived in a child care desert, where there are more than three children for every licensed child care slot.² Similarly, for every California child enrolled in an afterschool program, three are waiting to enroll, leaving more than three million students without access.³ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these access challenges in both systems.⁴
- **Affordability:** Infant care in a California center averages \$17,384 per year, 75 percent more than in-state public college tuition (\$9,940).⁵ Child care subsidy programs help working families with low incomes afford child care, but these programs only serve a fraction of eligible children⁶ and reimbursement rates for providers don't cover the cost of providing quality care.⁷
- **Compensation:** Despite high costs to families, California child care teachers are poorly compensated, with annual mean wages of \$35,390, compared to \$42,210 for preschool teachers, and \$85,760 for kindergarten teachers.¹⁰ Reimbursement rates for subsidized care have not kept pace with increases in the state minimum wage: despite strong revenue growth over the past five years, California policymakers have increased reimbursement rates just twice since 2016-17. Meanwhile, the state minimum wage has increased 40 percent.¹¹ This situation has left child care providers unable to provide staff competitive wages. As a result, many child care providers, many of whom are women of color, are unable to meet their basic daily needs and are eligible for subsidized care themselves. Low wages contribute to teacher turnover and staffing shortages, creating instability for

child care programs, parents, and children, and contributing to the shortage of child care slots.¹²

The California afterschool workforce faces the same challenges, with low reimbursement rates resulting in even lower staff compensation, impacting program supply and student access.¹³

Research shows that quality child care and afterschool programs set children on the path to success

For example, a longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age 4 compared to children in lower-quality child care. At age 15, they were still performing slightly above their peers and had significantly lower levels of behavior problems.¹⁴ By age 26, participants from families with low incomes, who spent two or more years in high-quality child care, were more likely to graduate from college and had higher salaries, compared with those who had been in lower-quality care.¹⁵

Child care teachers can also help children develop healthy habits at a young age by serving nutritious meals and ensuring children get adequate exercise throughout the day.¹⁶ Child care programs that emphasize healthy eating and physical activity can help reduce children's risk of obesity, as these healthy habits can last a lifetime. For example, a study of the Abecedarian program found that girls who participated were less likely to become obese as adults, and boys had fewer risk factors for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.¹⁷

High-quality afterschool programs help keep kids safe and build their academic, social, and emotional skills in a number of critical ways. These programs provide a

“Resources are essential to supporting our workforce during uncertain times. Policymakers must invest in child care and afterschool programs for our children and their families.”



ReadyNation member

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safe and stable environment that can prevent youths from engaging in dangerous behavior or becoming the victim of a crime.¹⁸ These environments also contribute to other positive outcomes, such as better school attendance, improved classroom behavior, higher academic performance (GPAs; reading and math scores), increased physical activity and healthier eating, reduced substance use, and improved graduation rates.¹⁹

For instance, a study of LA's BEST, which serves children ages 5 to 12 in Los Angeles Unified School District elementary schools, found that students with high levels of attendance in the program were five percent less likely to dropout of school and six percent more likely to graduate from

“Workers in our communities should be provided with quality, affordable child care whose main objective is to house and protect children during their family’s working hours.”



Fight Crime: Invest in Kids member
Edwin Brock
Chief, Arvin Police Department

high school on time, compared to their peers who did not participate in the program.²⁰ Additional research determined that youth who consistently attended LA’s BEST were 30 to 50 percent less likely to commit a juvenile crime.²¹

One comprehensive, longitudinal study by investigators at the University of California, Irvine examined the impact of both child care and afterschool programs.²² Children who attended higher quality child care before age 4 ½ had higher reading comprehension and math scores at age 15. The same was true for children who spent more periods of time in afterschool programs in grades K through five. Looking at behavior, children who were in higher quality child care had fewer behavioral problems and those who spent more

periods of time in afterschool programs had higher levels of social confidence.

In sum, quality child care and afterschool programs support children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development, setting them on a path to success in school and careers, and away from crime. These programs can also help youth qualify for military service, if they so choose, by addressing factors (poor academic performance, crime, substance use, and obesity) that currently prevent 71 percent of California youth from qualifying.²³

Policymakers should promote access to affordable, quality child care and afterschool programs

California policymakers should address low and unequal reimbursement rates for child care and afterschool providers, inadequate staff compensation, and uneven staffing and training requirements that lead to a fragmented system of care for California’s children. Specifically, policymakers should target funding to ensure adequate compensation and staffing ratios for care for children up to age 8. Additionally, state funding to provide care during summer and other non-school days must be made available for all ages, including middle and high school students. California must recognize the need for continuity of care and developmentally-appropriate care, and support the essential workforce that makes this care possible, by setting policy that aligns rates, skills, and needs.

Support for high-quality child care and afterschool programs is an investment in California’s economic well-being and public safety, and our nation’s security.

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