THE CURRENT SITUATION

Child care and preschool are necessities for working families, but the high price of care puts them out of reach for most. Parents are faced with impossible choices and are left weaving together a patchwork of care or making career sacrifices that affect their families’ economic security. The district needs to increase public investment to make affordable, high-quality child care a reality for families and providers.

| Number of children under the age of 6
| 53,363 |
| Percent of children under the age of 6 with all available parents in the workforce
| 74.50% |
| Average annual child care tuition for two children
| $42,323 |
| Percent of median income the average family spends on child care for two children
| 44% |
| Percent of population that lives in a child care desert
| 27% |
| Number of parents making career sacrifices due to issues with child care
| 3,989 |

HOW THE DISTRICT IS FALLING SHORT

Existing early learning supports are inadequate. Child care subsidies do not cover the cost of high-quality care, and they fail to reach the majority of those in need. While the district has implemented universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, the limited revenues available to support early learning programs that serve infants and toddlers leave a large part of the early childhood workforce woefully underpaid and restrict young children’s access to high-quality care.

| Percent of children under the age of 6 meeting federal income requirements who receive child care subsidies
| 3.90% |
| Percent of 4-year-olds served by public preschool
| 85% |
| Gap between the true cost of high-quality infant care and the current subsidy rate
| $17,777 |
| Percent of income the median family would pay to cover the true cost of high-quality child care for two children
| 61% |
| Median hourly wage for child care workers
| $14.33 |
| Median hourly wage for preschool teachers
| $18.02 |

OPPORTUNITIES

Expanding the child care subsidy system to cover all low- and middle-income families and fully funding the Birth-to-Three for All D.C. Act are two critical steps the district can take to support working families. Increasing public investment in the early learning system in this way would lead to substantial benefits for children, families, and the broader district economy.

| Number of young children that an expanded child care subsidy system would serve
| 31,859 |
| Amount the median family with two children would save if child care costs were capped at 7 percent of family income
| $39,309 |
| Estimated annual economic benefit of affordable child care
| $1.2 B |
| Estimated annual economic benefit of universal preschool
| $220 M |


3. Based on the price of center-based care for one infant and one 4-year-old from Child Care Aware of America, “The US and the High Cost of Child Care: A Review of Prices and Proposed Solutions for a Broken System” (Arlington, VA: 2018), available at https://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/costofcare/. This does not necessarily reflect the price most parents are paying, as most 4-year-olds attend preschool for 6.5 hours per day during the school year at no cost to families, through the district’s universal preschool program.

4. Author’s analysis based on the price of care for an infant and preschooler from Child Care Aware of America, “The US and the High Cost of Child Care” and the 2017 median income for families with children from Kids Count Data Center, “Median family income among households with children in the United States,” available at https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/table/65-med/MC2%Can-family-income-among-households-with-childrenc?loc=1&lct=2&det=2/2-53/false/871,867/any/any (last accessed July 2019). This does not necessarily reflect the price most parents are paying, as most 4-year-olds attend preschool for 6.5 hours per day during the school year at no cost of families, through the district’s universal preschool program.

5. Center for American Progress, “Child Care Deserts,” available at childcaredeserts.org (last accessed July 2019).


11. Author’s analysis based on Workman and Jessen-Howard, “Understanding the True Cost of Child Care for Infants and Toddlers,” and Kids Count Data Center, “Median family income among households with children.”


13. Ibid.


17. Author’s analysis based on the price of care for an infant and preschooler from Child Care Aware of America, “The US and the High Cost of Child Care” and U.S. Administration for Children & Families, “LIHEAP IM 2018-3 State Median Income Estimates for Optional Use in FY 2018 and Mandatory Use in FY 2019,” For methodology details, see Leila Schochet, “Proposed Bill Would Help American Families Afford Child Care.” This does not necessarily reflect the amount most families would save, as most 4-year-olds attend preschool for 6.5 hours per day during the school year at no cost to families, through the district’s universal preschool program.
