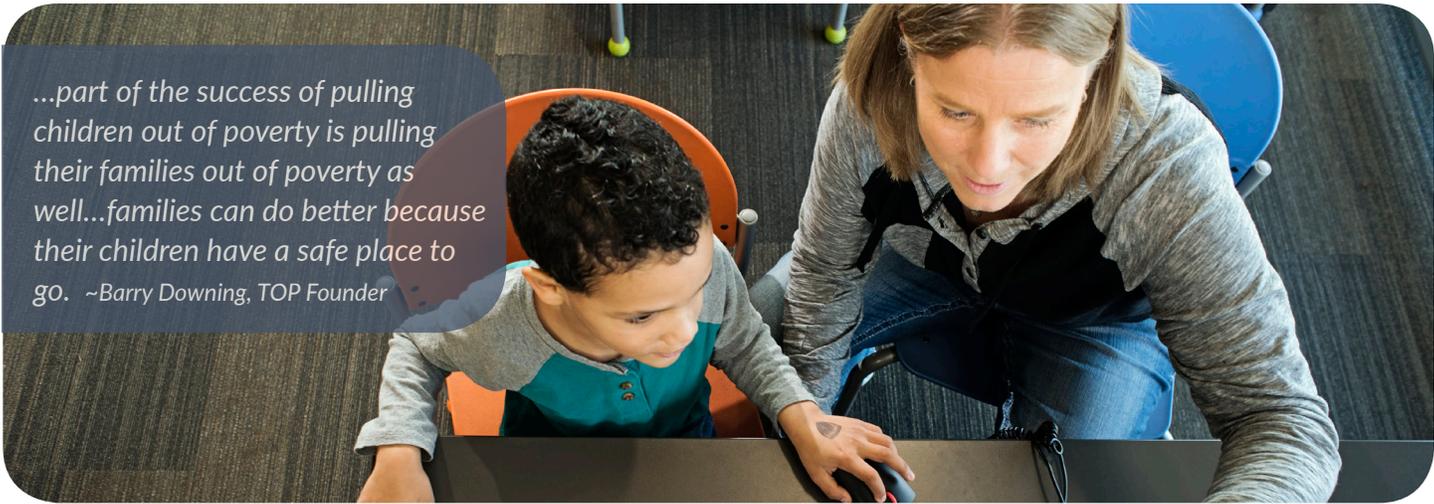


...part of the success of pulling children out of poverty is pulling their families out of poverty as well...families can do better because their children have a safe place to go. ~Barry Downing, TOP Founder



Full-Day, Year-Round Early Care and Education: Benefits and Barriers

POSITION STATEMENT FROM
THE KANSAS CHILDREN'S CABINET & TRUST FUND

The Kansas Children's Cabinet (Cabinet) recognizes that increased access to full-day early care and education benefits Kansas children, parents, communities, and the workforce.

Experiences during the first years of life have a lasting impact on learning, behavior, and health, making this a crucial stage of development. Providing children with positive learning experiences, such as attendance at a high-quality, full-day child care, propels development by providing a sense of safety and security while stimulating brain activity and learning. While children are prospering in a safe learning environment, their parents are free to focus on their employment, a necessity for the 209,000 Kansas children being raised in single-parent households¹ and the 61.9% of households with two working parents.²

WHEN AFFORDABLE FULL-DAY CARE IS AVAILABLE

- Children feel safe in their child care environments
- Children have a consistent support system
- Parents have fewer absences and better work performance
- Parents are less stressed
- Parents have increased opportunities to pursue their career and educational goals
- Employers have more reliable employees
- Employers will have a better prepared workforce
- Communities see increased economic growth
- Communities show increased engagement in children's growth and development

In order to increase our understanding of the benefits and barriers associated with full-day child care, staff from the Center for Public Partnerships and Research (CPPR) conducted interviews with Barry Downing, Janice Smith, and Cornelia Stevens. All three of these interviewees are integral to the development and/or continued success of The Opportunity Project (TOP Early Learning Centers) in Wichita. TOP, an Early Childhood Block Grant recipient, is a recognized leader in the state for improving access to high quality, full-day care for at-risk children. TOP was created using knowledge gained through years of research into the best strategies for significant and lasting change for children in poverty, serving as a model for other full-day initiatives within the state.



BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Full-day, full-year child care prepares children for success in school, life, and the future workforce.

Early childhood is a time of rapid brain development. Studies show that by 2,000 days of life (roughly 5 1/2 years), a child's brain is 90% developed.³ Attendance at a quality full-day, year-round child care program can maximize brain development by providing stimulation and time to learn, while teaching school readiness skills such as following routines, forming positive relationships with peers, and self-regulation. When children have an opportunity to learn these skills early, they enter kindergarten ready to learn, which has lifelong impacts. Kindergarten readiness is associated with reading proficiently in third grade, graduating from high school, attending college, and success in the workplace.⁴

While both half-day and full-day child care programs have been shown to increase a child's school readiness, children attending full-day, full-year early child care programs show better outcomes.

Children in full-day child care programs scored higher in language, math, social/emotional development, and physical health, and had lower rates of absences compared with their peers attending half-day programs.⁵

Researchers at Rutgers University found that children in a full-day program improved math and vocabulary skills almost twice as much as those in half-day programs. Cornelia Stevens, executive director of The Opportunity Project (TOP), attributes this to, "an environment that stimulates brain activity and learning throughout the day and all year round," preventing the loss of learning that often happens for children not in year-round services.

Despite the documented benefits of full-day care, most publicly-funded programs provide only half-day care,⁶ placing children whose families are unable to afford private childcare at a disadvantage and impacting children of color disproportionately.



With an estimated 41% of 4-year-olds attending publicly funded programs,⁷ a significant number of children are likely to be unprepared for kindergarten, perpetuating the achievement gap experienced by children living in poverty.⁸ Expanding access to full-day child care has the potential to significantly alleviate the educational achievement gap by giving all children an opportunity to start kindergarten prepared. As one study demonstrated, when high-quality full-day care is available to all, even children who enter preschool behind their peers can develop vocabulary, math, and literacy skills that approach national norms.⁹

BENEFITS FOR PARENTS

Increased access to full-day child care has a number of benefits for families.

The peace of mind that comes with knowing their child is in a safe place allows parents to focus on their own educational and career goals, a benefit that ultimately extends into the workforce and communities. In addition, the consistency of full-day care alleviates a variety of household stressors. The result, says Barry Downing, Wichita businessman and founder of TOP, is, "happier, more well-adjusted, and successful families."

Just as children benefit from the security and consistency of full-day care, parents benefit from knowing their child is safe. Every parent wants the best for their child, and parents face tough decisions when forced to balance providing for their family with the inability to afford quality full-time care. When faced with the necessity of earning a living, parents are often required to leave their children in the care of an unlicensed friend or neighbor who can provide affordable full-day care. In addition to potentially placing their child's development and physical safety at risk, this takes an emotional toll on the parents, leaving them less engaged in the workplace. As Stevens explains, "If parents have a place to send their children where they know they are getting appropriate care and they are learning and growing, then they can go find jobs because they know that their children are safe."



Navigating a full-time work schedule with half-day child care can be a major contributor to family stress and put a parent's employment at risk. High levels of household stress can have lasting developmental consequences for young children, making stress reduction a priority for all family members.¹⁰

With increased access to full-day care, parents and children avoid the stressors of last-minute schedule changes and benefit in knowing they have safe, consistent care.

Parents who work full time face several logistical stressors when full-day care is not an option, including the need to leave work mid-day to move a child from one child care setting to another or the need to utilize informal care. Informal care, which is less reliable than a full-day child care center, comes with an increased risk of last-minute cancellations that may require parents to

be late or be absent from work and could be less viable as a long-term solution.

BENEFITS FOR THE WORKFORCE AND COMMUNITY

Increased access to full-day child care strengthens the workforce of today and the workforce of the next generation.

As Stevens expresses, "full-day preschool is important if we want families to be successful in the workforce." The peace of mind and stability that accompany full-day child care enhance both the efficacy and attendance of parents in the workplace.

One study found that when employees had access to full-day child care, employee absences decreased by 20-30% and turnover was reduced by 37-60%.¹¹ Another study found that 63% of employees reported improved productivity associated with having access to quality child care.¹²

When Families **HAVE ACCESS** to Full-Day, Quality Care

EMPLOYEE ABSENCES DECREASE BY	20-30%
EMPLOYEE TURNOVER IS REDUCED BY	37-60%
EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY IS SELF-REPORTED AS IMPROVED BY	63%

When Families **LACK ACCESS** to Full-Day, Quality Care

73% OF PARENTS REPORT THAT THEIR JOB HAS BEEN IMPACTED BY CHILD CARE PLANS FALLING THROUGH AT THE LAST MINUTE

The skills children gain by attending quality, full-day care strengthen the workforce of the future. As Downing explains, “From the business standpoint, we need higher quality workers. How do you get a higher quality worker? Higher quality education for the child.” Children who enter kindergarten ready to learn are more likely to succeed in school, graduate from high school and attend college,⁴ increasing the level of knowledge available to the employees. Improved access to full-day care also increases the diversity of skills in the workforce by decreasing racial and economic achievement gaps.

The impact of high-quality full-day care expands into communities, having a significant impact on the economic growth and overall well-being of Kansas towns. Downing described the case of Coffeyville, Kansas, where, several years ago, a lack of accessible full-day child care led families to reside over the border in Oklahoma and commute to Coffeyville for work. As a result, the Coffeyville community was “losing workers, losing tax base, and the quality of the community was suffering.” Seeing the need for accessible childcare, however, the community pulled together and through the engagement of local organizations and private-sector partners, filled this gap in resources. Coffeyville is now a success story, offering inspiration and guidance to other communities seeking to expand this important resource.

Child care related absences are expensive for businesses, costing them an estimated \$3 billion annually.¹¹

Stevens also spoke about the value that accessible full-day care can bring a community in her description of Wichita following the opening of a TOP center. With increased access to affordable and high-quality care, the neighborhood has seen a number of positive changes, including the development of new afterschool care facilities, a magnet school for older children, and a food pantry to help those in need. As she says, “Everybody wants good opportunities for their children and families, and we’ve seen the communities embrace that.”

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

With all the benefits of full-day care, why are we not seeing more of it? The implementation of a full-day child care center presents several challenges to programs. As Stevens points out, sustaining a full-day child care center is expensive. Although families contribute to the expenses through tuition payments, the operating costs exceed what the average family is able to afford, making external funding an important factor in sustaining programs. She also explains that obtaining funding for a full-day program can be a struggle and often requires the blending and braiding of funds, something that is not an option with all funding streams. Other logistics, such as meal offerings and the extended hours required for parents to drop off and pick up children before and after their workday, creates additional staffing needs and expenses.



Janice Suzanne Smith, executive director of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and former executive director of TOP, voiced that finding and keeping high-quality teachers is one of the biggest challenges faced in child care. Both Smith and Stevens emphasize that the most important trait in a teacher is the ability to have high-quality relationships with the children in their care. As Stevens explains, the skills required to be an effective early childhood teacher are, “a lot more than textbook...[it is a teacher’s] ability to understand the lives that our children

are living, have care and compassion, and respond to them in a way that allows them to feel nurtured and comforted and loved.” She goes on to say that it is only when children feel nurtured and cared for that they are able to learn. Smith echoes this sentiment and adds that it is difficult to find people who have the skillset required to be an effective early childhood teacher. She goes on to explain that even once high-quality teachers are found, a combination of low pay and the difficulties of the job shift the challenge to keeping staff.

While staff turnover is a challenge for any business, early childhood educator turnover has a range of consequences. A 2011 study reported that teacher turnover has a negative impact on children, parents, and all areas of classroom functioning.¹³ Until the \$18,900 annual median salary of a child care worker in Kansas¹⁴ increases, however, Smith feels confident this struggle

will continue. Summing up the realities of living on such a low wage, she describes, “You can only be idealistic for a couple of years and then you gotta go find a different job.”

A NEW INITIATIVE

The 2019 Governor’s budget includes funding for a new initiative to expand access to full-day care. The purpose of Communities Aligned in Early Development & Education (CAEDE) is to improve school readiness and the health of at-risk children. Through a partnership that pairs public investment with private, business investment, CAEDE will support communities seeking to produce children who are successful in school, work, and life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Advocate for the creation of full-day child care centers in low-income neighborhoods.

Partner with business leaders and other funders to expand current full-day programs and start new programs across the state.

Continue to advocate for increased access to high-quality early childhood for all Kansas families through outreach to policy-makers and the business community.

Promote professional development and incentive programs to help child care centers meet the goals of a high-quality, educated, and stable diverse workforce.

Develop or revise statewide career pathways that provide a road map for early childhood professionals to advance in their careers through increasing levels of education, experience, demonstrated competencies, and compensation.

Seek out and promote public-private partnerships to provide funding opportunities for early childhood centers.

Offer incentives and rewards to existing high-quality programs.

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