

# Child Care Providers Have Enormous Value. We Must Do Better At Valuing

**Published: Tuesday, 19 December 2017 11:14**

**Written by: Anna Thomas**

---



Governor Herbert released his 2018 budget last week, and we at Voices for Utah Children are thrilled with the emphasis on investing in our kids through education. Clearly, our state leaders understand that education is critical to Utah's future. We can't expect to develop the workforce of tomorrow, without investing in education today, right?

Who, then, are the "workers of today," who are responsible for developing our workforce of tomorrow? According to the Governor's Office, parents, of course, and definitely our hardworking school teachers.

There is an additional group of professionals who play a critical role in Utah children's lives and development, but who were largely overlooked in the Governor's budget: child care providers.

And if Utah continues to overlook this under-staffed and under-appreciated sector, our future can't be as bright as the Governor hopes.

The Governor's budget emphasizes the importance of an "educated workforce," and an educational system that produces the kind of workers sought by "high-value firms."

The term "high-value firm" probably causes many Utahns to think of Silicon Slopes,

# Child Care Providers Have Enormous Value. We Must Do Better At Valuing

**Published: Tuesday, 19 December 2017 11:14**

**Written by: Anna Thomas**

---

or Main Street Salt Lake, where prominent firms like Adobe and Goldman Sachs have set up shop in recent years.

But when I hear “high value,” I can’t help but think of the tireless providers of quality childcare in our state. They aren’t afforded anything close to the prestige enjoyed by software designers or investment bankers. They certainly aren’t compensated at a level that appropriately reflects the importance of their work, which includes laying the foundation of early education for thousands of Utah children.

They should be, though. On both counts. After all, they are providing a valuable service that our state workforce can’t function without.

According to the U.S. Census, more than half of all of Utah’s young children (under age 6) live in a home where all available parents work. This includes families with single parents, as well as families that need the contributions of two wage earners in order to make ends meet.

That’s more than 150,000 young children potentially in need of child care.

With around 41,000 available child care slots for kids of all ages statewide, the need is much greater than our child care sector can currently meet.

Private providers of child care – whether through childcare centers or via a family caregiver – do their best to provide high quality care that includes intentional instruction, spontaneous play, a safe environment and nurturing attention. In the words of Louise Stoney, co-founder of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, private providers tend to be “rooted in communities, connected to faith and neighborhood-based services, and trusted by families.”

This is *valuable* work. It deserves to be highly *valued*, as well.

Providing a safe, educational and supportive child care environment takes time, energy and – of course – plenty of financial investment. In fact, it is so expensive to provide high quality childcare to the families that most need it, that private providers can’t charge enough to cover their costs. To do so would price many low- and middle-income working families out of child care altogether.

# Child Care Providers Have Enormous Value. We Must Do Better At Valuing

**Published: Tuesday, 19 December 2017 11:14**

**Written by: Anna Thomas**

---

Accordingly, many providers operate on a financial razor's edge, with very little left over when the bills are paid. There are licensing and credential requirements, the cost of food and materials, the cleaning and upkeep of buildings. Many struggle to end each year in the black. That makes it very, very difficult to pay child care practitioners – the people who watch over and interact with Utah children while their parents contribute to our powerhouse economy – anything close to what they deserve to make.

Despite the incredibly important work they do, keeping our children safe and contributing to the “early architecture” of their developing brains, childcare professionals make an average of \$22,310 a year. That's less than \$11 an hour.

Understandably, retention is a constant struggle in the child care field. Even as employers invest in higher quality child care offerings – providing educational opportunities and certifications for their workers, for example - they watch their increasingly-qualified employees leave for more lucrative jobs elsewhere.

Child care practitioners would like to make more; their employers would like to pay them more. The necessary shoe-string budgeting, unfortunately, simply does not work in favor of these important “early teachers” of our children.

While Governor Herbert did not explicitly mention high quality *childcare* in his budget, he did emphasize the importance of funding “high-quality preschool services for disadvantaged students and those at risk of academic failure. We would encourage the Governor and his staff to begin to think of childcare, including that provided by private business, as part of that critical early education equation.

We are hopeful that, with support from the Governor's Office, our highly competent Department of Workforce Services can develop innovative ways to support what is at the same time a very important sector of our economy, and a critical contributor to early education.

Early childcare providers make workforce participation possible for so many Utahns. They play an important role in getting low-income and struggling families back to work. We need to start caring about them, as much as we want them to be caring about our kids.

# Child Care Providers Have Enormous Value. We Must Do Better At Valuing

**Published: Tuesday, 19 December 2017 11:14**

**Written by: Anna Thomas**

---