

Date: September 16, 2020

To: Wendy Wintersteen, President

From: University Child Care Task Force Co-Chairs
Dawn Bratsch-Prince, Associate Provost for Faculty
Kristi Darr, Vice President, University Human Resources
Carolyn Cutrona, Associate Dean, Graduate College

Subject: Child Care Task Force Final Report and Recommendations

Introduction

On September 10, 2019 the Child Care Task Force was charged with developing a set of recommendations to address the lack of high-quality, affordable child care available to Iowa State University's students, staff, and faculty. The Task Force, which included stakeholders from the university community and representation from the City of Ames, met monthly through March 2020 to review available information, reports, and data, and to identify potential partners in Ames and Story County.

We quickly concluded that there is no single solution to the child care shortage in our community. Rather, the university, city, county, and business partners must work together on multiple strategies for addressing the child care challenge. We forward the following short- and long-term recommendations, which we believe begin to address the lack of sufficient affordable child care.

We also note that this report was prepared prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This public health emergency, along with the closure of schools and child care facilities, has dramatically highlighted the critical necessity of available and affordable child care for Iowa State employees and student parents.

Short-term Recommendations

1. Consider repurposing The Comfort Zone

The Comfort Zone, managed by University Community Childcare, has provided child care services to mildly ill children of the ISU community since 1993. Located in the Family Resource Center, data show that the Comfort Zone is underutilized despite efforts to market its services. From 2015 through 2019, The Comfort Zone has been closed 44% of normal operating hours due to no children in attendance. During the same time period, less than 1% of staff and faculty utilized The Comfort Zone. Students accounted for the highest usage with 39% of hours used,

followed by community members (26%; no ISU-affiliation), faculty (20%), and staff (14%). In 2020, The Comfort Zone was forced to close two days per week when no RN was available to be on duty per Iowa Department of Human Services requirement. Due to COVID-19, The Comfort Zone closed in March 2020 and has yet to reopen.

As a result of underutilization, the inability to recruit and retain an RN, and the current global pandemic, we recommend repurposing the current program space occupied by The Comfort Zone into an infant/toddler program space that could accommodate up to 8 children. With an ISU child care center waiting list in excess of 350 children, this is a small, but needed, action.

2. Gather data on student parent needs

ISU has little data on the number of undergraduate and graduate students who are parenting while pursuing a college degree, and little concrete information is available on their challenges and needs. However, we know this population faces unique challenges when it comes to balancing coursework, employment, finances, and caregiving responsibilities, often resulting in lower degree attainment and higher debt. In February 2020, Iowa State implemented the “ISU Student Experience Survey,” a component of the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit, in order to obtain direct information regarding the lives and experiences of the university’s student parents. The survey was distributed electronically to all current undergraduate, graduate, and professional students at ISU. Of those who completed the survey, 172 were student parents.

Respondents identified childcare affordability and accessibility as well as time management as significant challenges to their academic success. Additionally, many respondents expressed a feeling of isolation and lack of participation in campus activities due to their parenting status. The collection and analysis of this data is a first step towards determining the current status of, and gaps in, institutional resources and programming in support of student parents. We recommend the university continue to gather data regularly in order to inform the continuous improvement of support systems for student parents. One action that has been taken is the creation of a network and listserv for ISU parents and Family Friday virtual programming through WorkLife@ISU.

3. Develop a program on flexible work schedules for employees

As outlined in the most recent *Campus Climate Study* and P&S Council Priorities, university staff are seeking creative work arrangements in order to obtain work-life balance and support the needs of the university. The way people work is evolving, and Iowa State wants to see each employee achieve high productivity, enhance creativity and innovation, enhance health and wellbeing, and create dynamic working conditions to support achieving the university’s mission. Providing a variety of options is also critical to the ongoing retention of staff.

The committee’s recommendation for a program offering flexible work schedules was expedited dramatically by the onset of COVID-19 in March and the directive to the majority of employees to work from home. Guidelines and models were quickly put in place to address this rapid transition. Looking ahead to a post-pandemic workplace, University Human Resources is leading the effort to outline a Flexible Work Program for staff. The Faculty Work-Life Advisory Committee, in collaboration with ISU ADVANCE, will work with the Office of the Senior Vice

President and Provost to raise awareness of established flexible policies and programs for faculty.

4. Seek funding to support scholarships for student parents

Affordability of quality child care continues to be a serious issue for student parents, as we learned from the ISU Student Experience Survey. We propose that the ISU Foundation include as one of its fundraising priorities the establishment of child care scholarships for student parents. To facilitate the Foundation's efforts, we have developed some talking points (Appendix A) to share with interested donors as a way to illustrate the very real impact that scholarship support for student parents will have.

Longer term recommendations

1. Leverage partnerships with the City of Ames, Chamber of Commerce, Story County, United Way, and local industry to establish additional child care centers in Ames

Establishing new child care centers is part of an approach to increasing accessibility of reliable child care in our community. As of January 1, 2020, there were reportedly over 200 children on waiting lists at current licensed facilities in the Ames area. One factor in attracting individuals and families to live, study, or work in Ames and Story County is the availability of quality childcare. Working with our partners, we can identify local brick-and-mortar facilities that have the capacity to serve as suitable sites for child care centers. Attracting an agency or provider to run such a center may be facilitated by tax incentives under consideration at the state level. We recommend that the university, city, county, United Way, and chamber continue to partner on identifying realistic opportunities for development.

2. Increase subsidy for student child care

Iowa State's Student Government currently contributes to the affordability of child care for student parents via sizeable contributions to ASSET, a funding process that supports local human service organizations. These child care allocations go to University Community Childcare (UCC) and Ames Community Preschool Center (ACPC) and reduce the costs of child care tuition through a sliding scale. A small amount of Student Government funding has also gone to The Comfort Zone.

Student Government has considered several pathways for assisting students with child care including implementing an increase of \$1/student/semester in student fees, which would be dedicated to child care resources for student parents, and identifying a portion of graduate student fees that can be dedicated to child-care resources. The top priority of Student Government is to increase the accessibility of lower-cost child care options, specifically home-based child care. It is possible that Student Government funds could be identified to work toward increasing the number of local home child-care providers, through subsidizing recruitment and training of new providers in return for a certain number of reserved child-care slots for student parents. This long-term project requires coordination with Child Care Resource & Referral, which currently provides training for home child-care providers.

3. Create leadership committee to pursue partnerships for expanding child care accessibility in the city and county

Recognizing the ecological nature of child care as a community issue, we recommend continued efforts to build partnerships throughout the city and county to address the shortage of child care access, affordability, and quality. Specifically, we recommend the creation of a new standing committee of external community and university representatives, chaired by a senior leader, focused on pursuing community collaborations. External committee representatives include community and other childcare organizations. Their primary charge is to maintain momentum in advocating for programs, partnerships, infrastructure, and policies that address the complex challenge of child care in Ames and Story County, in support of our ISU families. A review of the current University Child Care Committee charge and membership should be evaluated to align the missions of the two committees and to spur opportunities for collaboration.

The Task Force recognizes that COVID-19 has changed our work, our institution, and our world in unimaginable ways. Nevertheless, the need for access to affordable child care has never been so great. We encourage the university to make child care access a priority in partnership with city, county, and local businesses.

Appendix A

Increasing Child Care Scholarships for Student Parents: Talking Points for ISU Foundation

- Child care costs more than tuition.
 - Even with the highest income-based subsidy, a year of full-time infant care at the least expensive ISU childcare facility (University Community Childcare; UCC) costs \$9,600 (\$800 per month). One year of undergraduate in-state ISU tuition and fees costs \$9,320.
 - Full-time infant care at a home-based program in Ames = \$8,320/yr.
 - Full-time infant care at a community-based center in Ames = \$15,184/yr.
- Nationally, students with children are less likely to complete their degrees.
- Student-parents accrue greater student loan debts than those without children.
- For single mothers in Iowa, completing a four-year college degree means a much brighter future.
 - They are 68% less likely to live in poverty than a high school graduate.
 - They earn almost \$550,000 more over their lifetime than if they had stopped at a high school diploma.
- It is good for the State of Iowa for single mothers to complete college.
 - They save the state about \$36,000 in public assistance over their lifetime.
 - They contribute about \$194,000 more in taxes than a high school graduate over their lifetime.
- The subsidy ISU provides to University Community Childcare (\$47,000/yr.) to lower the cost of child care tuition for low-income families has not been increased since 1990.
- ISU is a recipient of a four-year grant from the US Department of Education to subsidize child care tuition for low-income student parents. The grant ends September 30, 2022.
 - In 2018, only 46 ISU student families received this subsidy.
- Only one campus center (UCC) is a non-profit entity eligible to receive public funding from ASSET, through which ISU Student Government provides funding to subsidize child care tuition fees.
 - Student-parents who are not able to enroll their child at UCC (or the one other community-based nonprofit program who receives ASSET/Student Government funding) therefore do not receive this subsidy, which comes from student fees, which they pay.
- Home-based childcare can more affordable than center-based care. However, Story County has lost approximately 50% of its home-based providers since 2011.

- There are almost 500 children on the waiting lists at the campus child care centers.
 - There are 358 infants waiting for only 58 slots in ISU facilities.
 - The average wait time for a childcare center slot is two to three years.
- Working student-parents face a number of challenges.
 - Working parents are more likely to miss work, drop shifts, switch employers, or leave the workforce altogether
 - In Iowa, 17,915 parents quit a job, or did not take a job because of childcare issues in one year (2016).
 - 63% of parents say childcare costs negatively influence their careers.
 - When employers provide childcare, employee absences decrease by up to 30% and job turnover declines by as much as 60%
- The State of Iowa is affected by childcare issues.
 - Due to an employee shortfall, there is an estimated \$675 million unrealized annual GDP for the State of Iowa.