

CHILD CARE TASK FORCE: ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP

In September 2019, President Wintersteen convened a Child Care Task Force charged with developing a set of recommendations to address the lack of high-quality, affordable child care available to the Iowa State University community. Compounding the issue, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically emphasized the need for multiple strategies to address our child care challenges. In September 2020, the Child Care Task Force presented four short-term and three long-term recommendations to President Wintersteen and received approval to move forward with each recommendation. This report describes the progress achieved on each recommendation since Fall 2020.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Repurposing The Comfort Zone

The Comfort Zone provided child care services to mildly ill children of the ISU community beginning in 1993. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, utilization of The Comfort Zone steadily declined and staffing the program with a registered nurse became increasingly difficult.

The cost of repurposing The Comfort Zone totaled \$117,000, and construction began in March 2021. Around this same time, ISU was awarded two state grants totaling \$41,750, offsetting 36% of the project cost. All construction was completed in August 2021, and the new classroom was expected to open with the start of the fall 2021 semester. However, a nationwide shortage of child care workers has delayed the opening. ISU continues to partner with the University Childcare Center (UCC) to support their recruitment of staff.

2. Gather data on student parent needs

A February 2020 survey collected direct information regarding the lives and experiences of ISU student parents. Respondents identified child care accessibility and affordability as well as time management as significant challenges to their academic success. Additionally, many respondents expressed feelings of isolation and lack of participation in campus activities due to their parenting status.

In response to these findings, a family friendly room in Parks Library opened in August 2021 and is supported by the University Library, Student Government, Graduate and Professional Student Senate, *ISU Daily*, and UHR WorkLife and Family Services. It recognizes the needs parents face while studying, researching and using library resources. The room is reservable, equipped with work stations for adults, and furnished with toys and materials to keep children occupied. In addition, the Cyclone Student Family Network kicked off with in-person social events in September and October 2021. A plan for ongoing opportunities for social networking as well as parenting education workshops is in development, with the goal of monthly events occurring during the academic year.

To effectively reach and support student parents at ISU, a reliable, consistent system to identify these students is necessary. The inclusion of a single question regarding parenting status during the course enrollment process would provide repeated, thorough opportunity to identify student parents attending ISU. Since the initial report, UHR has met with the Graduate College to continue to brainstorm ideas for reliably collecting the student data necessary as outlined in this recommendation. These conversations continue.

3. Develop a flexible work program for employees

As work environments continue to evolve and more organizations are providing flexible work arrangements for their employees, ISU must be competitive in recruiting and retaining top talent. ISU is implementing the ISU WorkFlex program. Professional and Scientific (P&S) and Merit staff will have

options for flexible work arrangements if they make sense for their job duties and the university's mission.

The WorkFlex program will provide staff with options that include:

- Flexible start/stop times – working outside the standard work hours
- Compressed work weeks – fewer but longer days (for example, four 10-hour days)
- Hybrid work – working from home or another designated location up to 60% of the time
- Reduced hours – moving to part-time
- Gradual return to work – gradually increasing hours following leave
- Retirement transition – gradually reducing hours when approaching retirement

4. Seek funding to support scholarships for student parents

University Human Resources continues to partner with academic units to support student parents, oftentimes sharing needs that may be met through completion grants. Information created by the task force have been shared with the ISU Foundation, and we continue to partner on future opportunities.

LONG-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

Through partnerships with the Ames Chamber of Commerce, ISU continues to partner to establish additional child care centers in Ames.

2. Increase subsidy for student child care

Iowa State's Student Government continues to contribute to the affordability of child care for student parents via its contributions to the Story County ASSET (Analysis of Social Services Evaluation Team), which funds local human services programs. For the 2021-2022 calendar year, childcare services are the top priority for the Student Government's ASSET allocations. 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.

Since 2019, the ISU Student Government's funding recommendations for child care have increased \$21,556, and we continue to work with Student Government to increase the subsidy for student child care in future years. Another component of this Student Government funding item was a collaboration with Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) to increase the number of local home child care providers, through recruitment and training of new providers in return for a certain number of reserved child care slots for student parents. Given the present state of child care and the additional responsibility placed on CCR&R as a result, progress on this final component has been minimal, but it will be revisited in the future.

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

Due to the ongoing needs of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the creation of a permanent leadership committee has not taken priority; however, ISU continues to partner with the ISU community to address childcare needs in association with COVID-19 and the long-term creation of additional childcare spaces in Story County.

During the pandemic, we hosted a community roundtable with various organizations (Ames City Schools, Ames Community Preschool Center, United Way, Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral, faith leaders, etc.) to help ISU and others respond to the child care crisis during COVID.

ISU, in collaboration with other employers, the City of Ames, and the Chamber of Commerce, continues to vigorously pursue the creation of additional childcare spaces to meet the demand in Story County.