



Supporting Quality Child Care: What Should We Do?

Findings from 12 Community Deliberative Forums

In fall 2005, over 300 Iowans in 12 community forums deliberated the public issue of improving the quality of child care. The forums were jointly sponsored by Iowa State University Extension, the Iowa Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, and the American Association of University Women. Three policy approaches for helping communities enhance the quality of child care were discussed: increasing government regulation; enhancing parent education; and facilitating parental care. Forums were held in Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Davenport, Dubuque, and in eight rural communities. Participants reflected a broad range of the population, including parents, grandparents, child care providers and professionals, school personnel, community and civic leaders, and legislators. However, child care advocates were in the majority.

Common Themes

Several common themes surfaced in the forums:

- ▶ The necessity of adequate funding to ensure quality care, including the need for subsidies to assist low-income families.
- ▶ The need to educate parents and the public about what to look for in quality care.
- ▶ The need for increased training for child care providers.

- ▶ The need for increased regulation that is consistent, enforceable and yet flexible to provide families with choices to meet their needs.
- ▶ A need for societal change in our values regarding the importance of children and the care they deserve.

Participants' Opinions

About 60% (189 of 318) of the participants completed a questionnaire following the forum. The brief survey assessed personal views and the extent to which they favored or opposed specific policies or programs. Support for formal training in child development ranked high with forum participants. Eighty-two percent agreed that all providers, including those involved in after-school programs, should have formal training. However, about half of the participants (49%) agreed that the best way to ensure quality care is for providers to voluntarily meet specific standards, and then limit any subsidies to those providers only. Two in three (67%) of the participants support increased government regulations such as licensing of all providers. About three out of five participants (62%) agreed that if parents are well informed, they will demand excellent quality child care. About half (55%) agreed that we should increase tax credits such as the Earned Income Credit so families can afford to have one parent stay at home; however, only 27% agreed that parents provide the best and highest quality care for children.

Table 1. Opinions

Agree Disagree

All child care providers including those involved with after-school programs, should have formal training in child development.



The best way to ensure quality child care is for providers to voluntarily meet specific standards, and then limit any subsidies to these providers only.



Iowa needs to increase government regulation in the child care industry, such as require licensing of all providers.



If parents have access to information and understand the importance of high quality care they will demand excellent care for their children.



We should raise tax credits such as the Earned Income Credit so families can afford to have one parent stay at home.



Parents provide the best and the highest quality of care for children.



Participants' Support for Programs and Policies

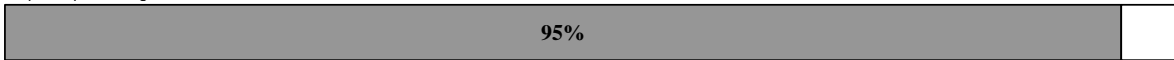
Participants voiced strong views on several policy approaches. Nearly all participants (95%) support expansion of parent education and a large majority (92%) favor investing more time and money in educating both parents and the general public about characteristics of quality child care. There was strong support for government involvement. Nearly all (95%) oppose the elimination of public funding of child care and 78% favor fully funded after-school and

summer programs as extensions of the public school system. Seventy percent favor publicly funded programs for all pre-school children even if it requires tax increases. Four in five (81%) favor establishing a set of quality standards for Iowa child care homes and centers that providers would voluntarily meet. Participants were evenly divided on increased government regulations in the industry. About half (49%) favor increased regulation even if this increases the cost of child care.

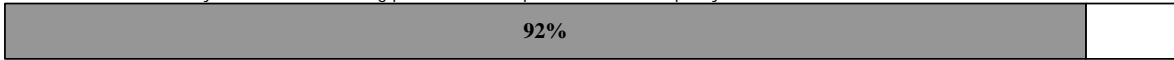
Table 2. Actions

Favor Oppose

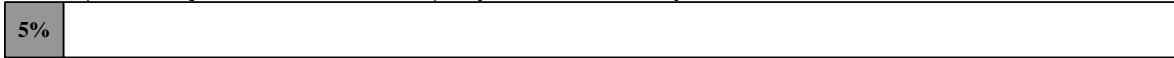
Expand parenting education efforts within the state.



Increase time and money invested in educating parents and the public about what quality child care is.



Eliminate public funding of child care; there are other priority needs in our community/state.



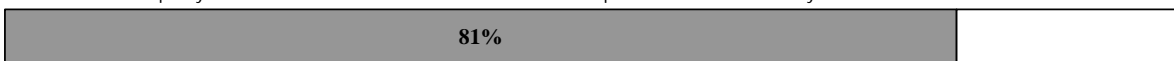
Fully fund after-school and summer programs as extensions of the public school system.



Publicly fund programs for all children birth to 5 years of age in all communities EVEN if it means raising taxes to pay the costs.



Establish a set of quality standards for Iowa child care homes/centers that providers would voluntarily meet.



Increase governmental regulations of child care EVEN if this increases the cost of child care.



Taking Action

At the conclusion of the forums, participants shared ideas about actions they planned to take:

- ▶ Share summary report with local Empowerment Board, Board of Supervisors, Child Care Task Force, and Human Resource Councils.
- ▶ Become involved with local child care coalitions.

- ▶ Share information and concerns with local legislators and decision makers.
- ▶ Convene another forum to educate others, including economic development leaders, and develop action steps.
- ▶ Organize educational workshops for child care providers on improving their business management skills.
- ▶ Establish a steering committee to develop a new day care center in the community.



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