



Supporting Quality Child Care: What Should We Do?

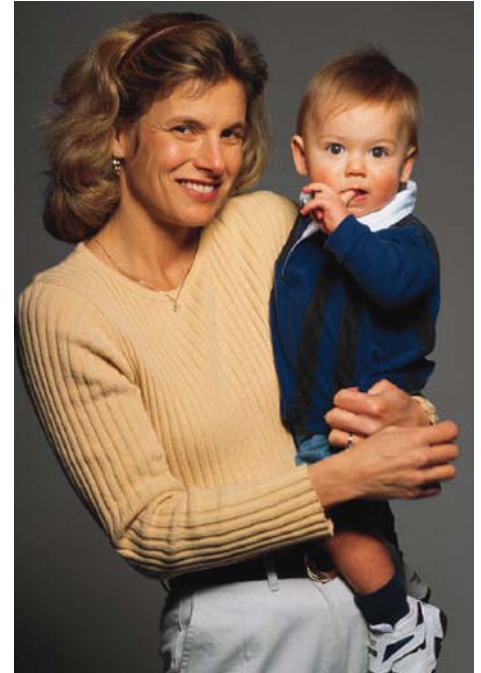
Findings from 12 Community Forums

More Inside

- **Common Themes**
- **Opinions**
- **Support for Programs and Policies**
- **Taking Action**

In fall 2005, more than 300 Iowans in 12 community forums deliberated the public issue of improving the quality of child care. They discussed three policy approaches for helping communities enhance the quality of child care:

- increasing government regulation
- informing and educating parents
- supporting parental care



Learn what Iowans say about improving the quality of child care in the state

Forums were held in Algona, Burlington, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Decorah, Des Moines, Dubuque, Eldora, Keokuk, Keosauqua, Ottumwa, and Tipton. Parents, grandparents, child care providers and professionals, school personnel, community and civic leaders, and legislators participated in the forums. The majority of participants were child care advocates.

The Child Care Lasts a Lifetime Community Conversations were sponsored by Iowa State University Extension, the Iowa Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, and the American Association of University Women.



Table 1. Opinions

Agree Disagree

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

82%

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.

49%

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

67%

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

62%

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

55%

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

27%

Common Themes

Several common themes surfaced in the forums. Participants identified needs for

- adequate funding to ensure quality care, including the need for subsidies to assist low-income families;
- education for parents and the public about what to look for in quality care;
- increased training for child care providers;



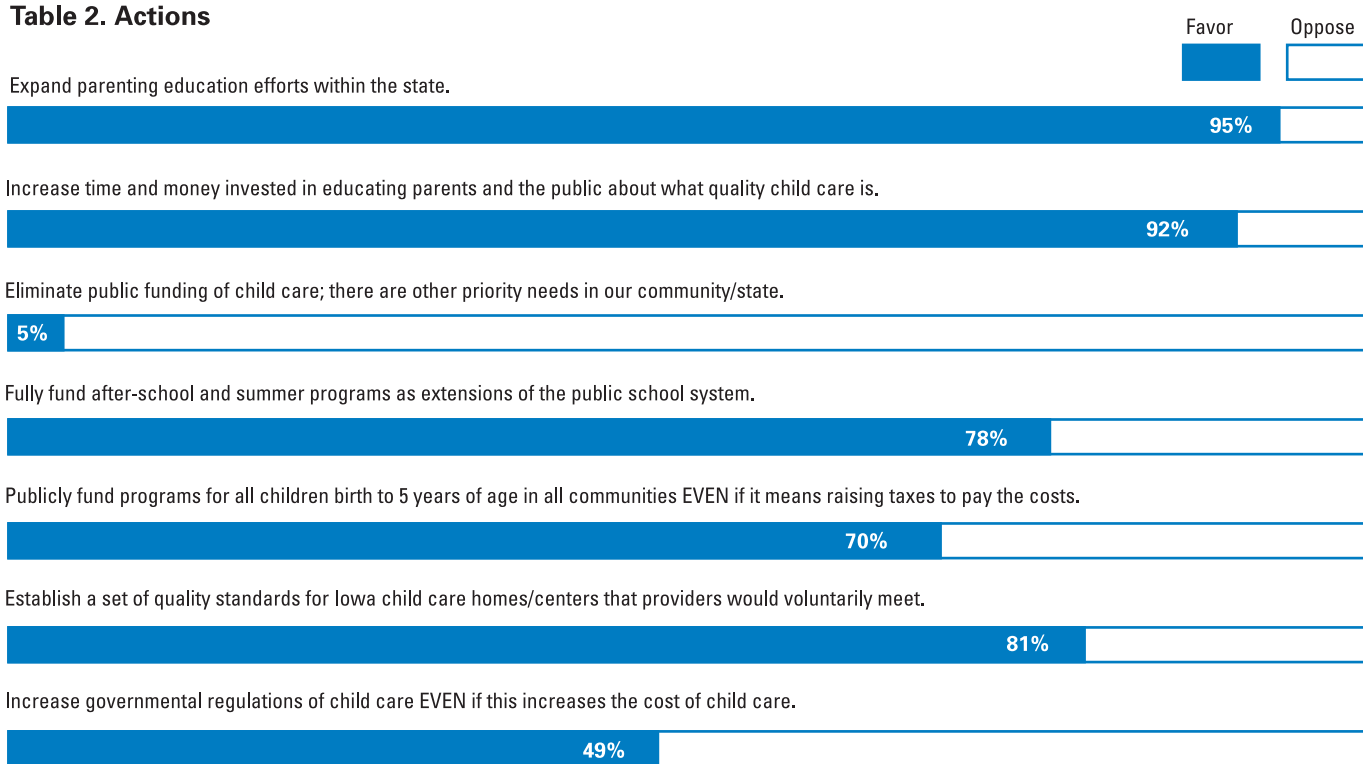
- increased regulation that is consistent and enforceable, yet flexible to provide families with choices to meet their needs; and
- societal change in our values regarding the importance of children and the care they deserve.

Opinions

About 60% (189 of 318) of the participants completed a questionnaire following the forums. The brief survey assessed personal views and the extent to which individuals favored or opposed specific policies or programs.

- Support for formal training in child development ranked high with Iowans at the forums. Eighty-two percent agreed that all providers, including those involved in after-school programs, should have formal training.
- 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 only those providers.

Table 2. Actions



- Two in three (67%) of the participants supported increased government regulations, such as licensing of all providers.
- About three out of five (62%) agreed that if parents were well informed, they would demand excellent quality child care.
- About half (55%) agreed that tax credits such as the Earned Income Credit should be increased so families could afford to have one parent stay at home.
- Only 27% agreed that parents provide the best and highest quality care for children.

Support for Programs and Policies

Participants voiced strong views on several policy approaches.

- Nearly all (95%) supported expansion of parent education.
- Ninety-two percent favored investing more time and money in educating parents and the general public about characteristics of quality child care.

- Nearly all (95%) opposed the elimination of public funding of child care.
- Seventy-eight percent favored fully funded after-school and summer programs as extensions of the public school system.
- Seventy percent favored publicly funded programs for all pre-school children, even if such programs would require tax increases.



- Four in five (81%) favored 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%) favored increased regulation even if such regulation would increase the cost of child care.

Taking Action

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

- Share a summary report with the local empowerment board, board of supervisors, child care task force, and human resource council.
- 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 child care center in the community.

Access this report online

www.extension.iastate.edu/childcare/quality/research.html



The Child Care Lasts a Lifetime Community Conversations (deliberative forums) were supported by Iowa State University Extension to Families, Iowa Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, and American Association of University Women, with partial funding by the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Excellence in Extension grant, and Helen LeBaron Hilton Fund—College of Human Sciences. This report was prepared by ISU Extension to Families.



For More Information

- www.extension.iastate.edu/childcare/quality/
- Lesia Oesterreich, ISU Extension family life specialist, (515) 294-0363, loesterr@iastate.edu

... and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

File: Family Life 9, Public Policy

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension