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SURVEY: NC CHILD CARE CENTERS STRUGGLING TO HIRE AND RETAIN STAFF

Staffing Challenges Have Forced Nearly One-Third of Care Centers to Close Classrooms With Little Notice to Parents

North Carolina child care providers are finding it difficult to hire and retain qualified staff as the state continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new [survey](#). As a result, nearly one-third (32%) of child care providers have abruptly closed classrooms with little notice to parents. Despite providers offering increased salaries and benefits to staff, more than 80 percent of child care centers surveyed report that it is more difficult to hire staff now than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The temporary closures that many child care providers across the state are imposing as a result of staffing shortages are disruptive to the development and education of North Carolina children and to our state’s continued economic recovery,” said Sheila Hoyle, executive director of the Southwestern Child Development Commission. “As we begin to rebuild and stabilize our economy from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need child care centers to be there for our children and our parents. It’s imperative for the future of our state.”

In an effort to attract and retain qualified staff, many child care providers say they have increased staff wages by more than \$1 per hour, or approximately \$2,000 annually, which represents an almost 10 percent increase in annual income for many child care teachers. Yet nearly half (48%) of surveyed providers acknowledge that the wages they offer are at best comparable to those being offered in sectors where employment entails far fewer responsibilities and fewer educational or training requirements, like stocking shelves or working checkout at grocery stores and big-box store retailers.

“The child care staffing crisis that we are currently experiencing is driven by the inability of program operators to pay higher wages without passing increased operating costs on to families who are already struggling to afford the cost of care,” said Janet Singerman, president of Child Care Resources Inc. “It’s time to appropriately and adequately support and compensate our child care workforce who are so critical to our state’s continued economic recovery. Without increased wages for child care professionals, child care programs will continue to struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff and North Carolina children and families will continue to experience high turnover within child care classrooms well into the future.”

In recent weeks state policymakers have directed some available federal dollars to child care providers in an attempt to temporarily stabilize the industry. Gov. Roy Cooper signed a measure that sets aside more than \$800 million for early childhood education centers. The temporary infusion of cash can be used on a range of child care needs, including: personnel costs; payments for rent, mortgage, utilities, facility maintenance or insurance; PPE; equipment and supplies.

“Policymakers have noted the dire state of North Carolina’s child care industry at a critical moment,” said Marsha Basloe, president of Child Care Services Association. “More must be done in the weeks and months ahead to fully address this crisis and it’s vital that policymakers continue to recognize the importance of the state’s child care industry and put it on stronger financial footing for the long-term. We cannot keep asking our child care workers to rise to the occasion of caring for our children without the resources, tools, and compensation they need and deserve.”

Additional survey findings include:

- Three in four child care providers surveyed (75%) are currently hiring lead or assistant teachers, with about half (53%) hiring both lead and assistant teachers. .
- Child care providers say the need for additional staff is a result of increased social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures..
- Two-thirds of respondents report having trouble retaining teachers or directors.
 - Nearly half (48%) report difficulty retaining lead teachers, 55 percent report difficulty retaining assistant teachers, and 7 percent report difficulty retaining center directors and assistant directors.
- Nearly three in five centers (59%) report combining classrooms during the pandemic. .

The findings come from a survey completed in September 2021 by more than 1,200 North Carolina child care centers. The research was conducted by Well World Solutions to better understand the staffing challenges currently facing North Carolina child care centers on behalf of the North Carolina Child Care Resource and Referral Council, with funding from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation.

Full survey findings are available [here](#).

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