



# Building on Historic Child Care Progress Will Create an Enduring Workforce Advantage for Massachusetts



NATE PHOTOGRAPHY

Pick up time at Children's Services of Roxbury's early education and child care program is a moment to share work proudly done.

Over the past four years - with an unprecedented level of commitment from state leaders, advocates, business, and philanthropy - Massachusetts has doubled its investment in child care.

This historic level of support has led to the restoration of the state's child care sector to its pre-pandemic levels, as the number of child care programs and seats has rebounded to March 2020 figures.

While the growth in support is itself a historic increment of progress, how and why these investments are being done is even more important. For the first time, Massachusetts is investing in child care strategically as infrastructure for workforce and economic development to support family economic mobility and economic competitiveness.

Governor Healey, building on several years of strong legislative leadership, is making strengthening child care a top priority, even as state revenues dip. This may be best exemplified by her call to all executive agencies for a whole-of-government approach to strengthening the child care sector. Leading by doing.

However, despite the recent surge in child care investments being both meaningful and measurable, just restoring the child care system that existed in March 2020 means we are OK with a system that was woefully inadequate in terms of the number of licensed programs needed to support our families and our economy.

We now find ourselves at a critical inflection point in Massachusetts. We can settle and risk squandering our hard-earned progress and momentum, or we can double-down and extend our commitment. Leveraging quality, affordable child care would create a bona fide competitive advantage to attract and retain the talent necessary to create an equitable and stronger Massachusetts economy.

It's no secret Massachusetts still faces massive labor force shortages and child care remains a huge barrier to labor market participation as for many families the cost of child care can often overshadow potential earnings.

We must take this moment to unleash the untapped talent that is under-engaged, or completely sidelined from the Massachusetts labor market due to the expense and scarcity of child care.

Massachusetts needs not only a whole-of-government approach, but also a whole-of-all-of-us approach, including and especially, Massachusetts employers.

Massachusetts families are our employees, customers, and community partners. Philanthropy can play an essential role in partnering with the child care system to promote innovation with the potential to scale with public investment, but our business community also can step up in other meaningful ways.

Businesses can amplify the message that

child care is an important engine for the entire economy, while engaging in creating public policies and employer practices that better support the child care needs of their own employees. In so doing they will distinguish themselves as an employer of choice for employees with young children.

Among the recent achievements in child care are the creation of new assets that make philanthropic and employer engagement easier and more effective, like the Massachusetts Early Childhood Funder Collaborative and the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education.

If we lean in now and continue to build on our recent Early Childhood Development leadership efforts, we can add excellence in child care to the current benefits of strong schools, good health care, job opportunity, and the beauty and accessibility of the natural resources across New England. This can help make our region a premier place to live, work and raise a family and create an extraordinary talent and economic hub for now ... and for generations to come.



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