

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OP-ED:

LACK OF SLOTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN CENTRAL PA IS A WORKFORCE CRISIS

Early childhood education, commonly referred to as childcare, improves quality of life by supporting cognitive, social and mental well-being of babies and young children, increases the financial stability of families by allowing adults to work, and stabilizes communities like those in Central PA as the workforce of tomorrow is cared for and taught the critical skills necessary for long-term success in the workforce.

Childcare slots across the nine-county workforce development region of Central PA (Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, Union) are critically low compared to demand. Existing facilities are under-staffed therefore unable to operate at full capacity.

Early childhood education is critical for our children. There are years of scientific evidence that show how the brains of young children develop and grow from infancy to age 5 and how critical these years are for young children to be nurtured and exposed to age-appropriate play and learning. The newest studies on early childhood education show long-term benefits that include improved health and longevity, reduced educational gaps, and gains for those in poverty and the population as whole.¹

At present, the limited slots in Central PA mean that children are not accessing the quality early learning they need. Consequences of which include that families who live and work in Central PA are removing themselves from the workforce to directly care for their children. Some families are choosing to have fewer children because there is not adequate access to care if both parents return to work. Meanwhile other families looking to relocate to our region may choose not to bring their talents and skills to Central PA because of the childcare drought.

The long-term consequences are dire. The population of Central PA was 622,036 in 2018 and is projected to decrease 4% by 2026 for a total population of 600,138. For the same time frame, the population under 5 years old will decrease significantly by 12%.² This means there will not be enough workers to fill jobs which equates to businesses leaving, families leaving, and a decreased tax base all of which put our rural region at great risk.

A number of issues collide in creating the early childhood education drought we are in. Wages for childcare workers are low to the point these individuals cannot sustain their own families with the wage they make. Turnover rates in the industry are high as workers can find other employment, including entry-level employment, with higher wages and less stress. This leads to facilities being unable to function at capacity,

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/08/new-look-benefits-quality-preschool-education/>

² Lightcast Q3 2023 Population Demographics Report

results in families abruptly losing childcare which puts their jobs at risk, and contributes to population decline as families realize they may need to choose between having a livelihood and having children. Early childhood education workers are responsible for teaching and caring for our children and deserve a living wage. The attached chart shows that wages for the individuals working in this important field in Central PA do not meet the cost of living.³

Conversely, the cost to families that utilize early childhood education is high. Families that can find a slot for their children are calculating whether their own salary is high enough to justify the cost of care. In many cases, people are dropping out of the workforce because of the cost of care.

So how do we reconcile the need to pay childcare workers a fair wage with the need for childcare to be affordable for families? Here are some things we can all do to help:

- Learn more about what early childhood education is and what it is not. While childcare is the more commonly used term, early childhood education is more aptly named because our babies and children deserve nurturing, caring environments that serve their whole needs, including for brain development, while their parents work.
- Email or call your state and federal elected officials to educate them and add your voice to the discussion. Share your expectation for bi-partisan policy that will make early childhood education accessible and affordable. State the negative impact to your local community because a lack of early childhood education openings equates to a workforce crisis. Express that you support funding early childhood education and want legislators to take action to make that happen.
 - Find your State Legislators:
<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/findyourlegislator/>
 - Find your US Legislators:
<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>
- Spread the word; educate your family, friends, and peers about the need for accessible early childhood education in your area and why this is so important at present and for the long-term. Ask them to advocate for the community by joining you in calling on state and federal elected officials.

³ Start Strong PA, [A Workforce on the Brink of Collapse with Devastating Consequences for Children- The High Cost of Working in Early Childhood Education](#), January 2023


Median Earnings Comparison to Cost-of-Living by County, 2021 Q2³

County	Median Quarterly Earnings (2021, Q2)	Estimated Full-Time Hourly Rate	Estimated Annual Earnings	Cost of Living	Share of Cost of Living
Centre	\$ 6,406	\$ 12.32	\$ 25,624	\$ 36,629	70%
Clinton	\$ 4,804	\$ 9.24	\$ 19,216	\$ 31,408	61%
Columbia	\$ 4,941	\$ 9.50	\$ 19,764	\$ 34,050	58%
Lycoming	\$ 5,638	\$ 10.84	\$ 22,552	\$ 33,779	67%
Mifflin	\$ 6,210	\$ 11.94	\$ 24,840	\$ 31,242	80%
Montour	\$ 6,316	\$ 12.15	\$ 25,264	\$ 33,821	75%
Northumberland	\$ 4,908	\$ 9.44	\$ 19,632	\$ 30,826	64%
Snyder	\$ 6,402	\$ 12.31	\$ 25,608	\$ 32,594	79%
Union	\$ 7,830	\$ 15.06	\$ 31,320	\$ 32,261	97%

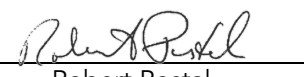
Signed,

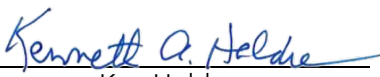

Steven Dershem
Centre County


Angela Harding
Clinton County

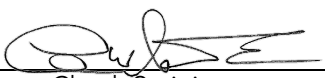

David Kovach
Columbia County



Richard Mirabito
Lycoming County


Robert Postal
Mifflin County


Ken Holdren
Montour County


Job Klebon
Northumberland County


Chuck Steininger
Snyder County


Stacy Richards
Union County

The Local Elected Officials (LEO) Board of Advance Central PA consists of one County Commissioner from each of the nine-counties in the workforce development area. The LEO Board provides oversight of Advance Central PA, ensuring fiscal accountability and fulfilling the crucial role of identifying and appointing the most qualified individuals to serve as members of the Workforce Development Board.

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<https://advancecentralpa.org/about-us/public-notice/>