
PRESS RELEASE

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Many expecting parents begin looking for child care long before the baby's arrival due to long wait lists. At the Starved Rock Regional Center in Ottawa, the wait list is about a year.

The lack of child care can keep many parents out of the workforce entirely. The Regional Office of Education 35 in Ottawa recently received a Birth to 5 Illinois grant allowing them to contract TPMA, a consulting firm in Indianapolis, to analyze the potential impact of expanding accessible, affordable child care in the region.

"The results of this study bring to light the significant potential that accessible child care could have for families in La Salle, Marshall, and Putnam counties," said Ryan Myers, ROE 35 Assistant Superintendent. "It's clear that when parents have the support they need, they are more likely to contribute to the workforce, which could have a positive impact on our local economy."

The report found 679 parents in those counties would work full time if they had child care, infusing millions into our economy annually.

These earnings would fuel the purchase of homes, support local businesses, and create additional jobs, earnings, and opportunities for employers and residents.

"Governments need to think of child care as infrastructure," said Brian Nottingham, senior director, research, evaluation and community impact at TPMA, citing examples such as roads, bridges, and railways as infrastructure governments provide and maintain to facilitate economic growth. "It's the cost of doing business, providing the infrastructure that's necessary to ship goods, to allow the flow of people, ideas, everything across their communities."

Should they return to the workforce full time, TPMA estimated they would earn between \$25.5 million and \$35.6 million annually. The payroll taxes would generate between \$1.3 and \$1.8 million in additional state income tax revenue. Additionally, the region stands to generate additional Gross Regional Product of between \$61.1 million and \$92.2 million. The GRP could result in extra revenue for local, state, and federal governments in property, sales, and import taxes, estimated to range between \$7.7 and \$8.5 million annually.

"The child care market, if not broken, it's pretty close. The model doesn't work for really anyone involved," said Nottingham, noting the challenges in making child care centers profitable, the difficulty of providing child care workers a livable wage and parents struggling to afford the costs. "Any other business system or model would have gone the way of the dodo bird. If you can't make money, if you can't pay your people, and your customers can't afford it it goes away."

"We don't have that luxury with child care. This is why I think it's really important to think of it from a government perspective as an investment in infrastructure. It's the cost of doing business. To get these folks into the workforce, increase your state's gross domestic product, and ultimately have more tax revenue coming in."

The 679 parents are willing to take on a full-time job but can't because they can't access suitable child care of any variety, due to a lack of availability, area providers, and/or the inability to afford childcare if it were available.

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There are nine licensed childcare centers and 31 licensed family child care homes in La Salle, Marshall, and Putnam counties. The child care sites are clustered mostly in La Salle County, with many miles between each cluster. There are three family child care homes in the northern part of Putnam County, and one located in the northernmost part of Marshall County.

Based on TPMA's estimates, the region must increase capacity by just under 12% annually to meet the total demand for access by 2033.

"We have the facts right in front of us – there's a lot to be done to bridge the exasperated needs of families with more accessible and trustworthy child care options, especially in smaller communities," said State Rep. Amy "Murri" Briel. "Expanding child care options to these communities is crucial to allow parents to work while children gain early education. When families have the support they need, our local economies and businesses do better, and communities become stronger. This is a priority of mine as we head into a legislative session where it'll be critical to highlight troubles of all Illinois families – not just those in larger cities."

The report suggested solutions to the gap in child care, which would include expanding after school offerings, addressing elementary school teachers wages and shortages, and providing childcare in or near school districts. The report suggested employers can provide solutions such as flexible scheduling, offering child care subsidies, exploring nontraditional solutions for working parents, on-site/near-site child care centers, and addressing equitable return to work strategies. Child care facility-based solutions included addressing compensation and fiscal stability.

Illinois Senate Minority Deputy Leader Sue Rezin said ensuring parents have access to affordable child care is one of the most important challenges facing our state.

"During my time as Minority Spokesperson for the Early Childhood Education Committee, I supported legislation to ease the burden on parents, such as expanding access to 24-hour daycare and offering tax credits for childcare and early education expenses. With the establishment of the Department of Early Childhood, we now have a dedicated agency to streamline services and licensing, but we must continue to work together to address this critical issue and provide the resources families need."

To read the full study and watch video of Nottingham's presentation, visit roe35.org.

