

Faculty appointed to the Quality of Faculty Work/Life Committee
Childcare Report
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Introduction

This report was prepared by the Faculty members listed above who were appointed to the QFWL by KSUFA¹. After years of research indicating that parenting is a stressful role with significant consequences for mental health, the US Surgeon General (US-SG) recently weighed in, noting in their 2024 report, 'Parents Under Pressure,' that over forty percent (40%) of parents feel so stressed that it affects their ability to function on a daily basis. The report also identifies financial stressors related to the expense of childcare to be a significant emotional strain on parents. Affordable, accessible, and flexible childcare has been repeatedly shown to benefit parental well-being and productivity and reduce perceived conflict between work and home (Kei Nomaguchi and Milkie 2020).

This report describes the need to improve childcare services in the Kent State University system.

We 1) provide an overview of recent research on the connections between childcare resources and workplace recruitment, retention, and productivity; 2) summarize the current state of childcare at KSU; 3) include testimonials from faculty members; 4) summarize childcare resources offered at peer and aspirant institutions; and 5) recommend specific action items toward this goal.

1) Importance of High-Quality Childcare for Faculty Recruitment and Retention

As in all workplaces, a family-friendly environment is critical in the recruitment, retention, and productivity of talented faculty to an R1 institution such as Kent State University. New faculty hires take childcare options into account when making employment decisions and family-friendly policies have been shown to improve retention (Feeney and Stritch 2019). As human resource experts have noted; 'We look at this as a recruitment and retention tool. It is an investment for the university because it's an important benefit for our faculty, staff and graduate students, especially our mid-career faculty.' (Knox 2019). Finally, while this report focuses on faculty, it is worth noting that there is a widespread need for childcare among staff and students and studies have shown that childcare is a factor for students when choosing a university, and we argue would contribute to long-term retention rates.

¹ For the second year in a row, the University declined to appoint a co-convener or members to the QFWL.

In an examination of 22 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, including the United States, Jennifer Glass and colleagues found that family services, including the provision of childcare, explained the lower self-reported levels of happiness among parents of young children compared with non-parents (Glass et al. 2016). The United States is a particularly lackluster performer on these metrics in that the only parental leave permitted is in the form of uncompensated leave through the Family and Medical Leave and the federal government does not provide universal public early childhood education.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that no more than 7% of a family's annual income should be spent on childcare. According to the US Census data from 2023, the median household income for married couples was \$119,400 and \$80,610 for all households. Married couple households account for approximately 47% of total households and even for those highest income households average childcare costs are nearly 10% of family's annual income. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2024/demo/p60-282.html#:~:text=Real%20median%20household%20income%20was,median%20household%20income%20since%202019>

There is also consensus about the importance childcare services play in creating diverse and equitable workplaces. For example, the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, in an internal report assert the following; "Inadequate childcare also contributes to falling female labor force participation rates, as globally women spend three times as many hours in unpaid care work as men. Childcare, however, is not a women's issue alone. All working parents, women and men, usually need childcare options to retain or get new jobs, with benefits accruing to communities, businesses, and economies." ("Tackling Childcare" 2017). This is one of the largest health care issues in the United States. It doesn't impact only parents, it impacts all of us.

2) State of Childcare at Kent State University

Since 1972, the Child Development Center (CDC) has served the campus community and though it has been an excellent resource, there are a number of limitations to the services offered.

These include; a) enrollment capacity, b) high tuition, and c) hours of operation aligned with the academic calendar, leaving twelve-month contract faculty without year-round care (e.g. no daycare is available during fall and spring breaks). In addition, the CDC only admits children between eighteen months to six years, there is little after school programming, there are no emergency and holiday/break care options, and the operational calendar does not follow the university calendar. Lastly, if your child is not eighteen months old by the start of the fall semester, you must wait an additional year before becoming eligible. This policy leaves quite a gap in quality childcare coverage, since many area newborn and toddler facilities have extensive waitlists.

Awareness of the CDC's limitations is not new. In 2002, a KSU childcare review committee issued a report suggesting that the University "explore ways to provide affordable and accessible childcare" including expansion of the CDC. Even though the demand has continued to grow, this proposal has not reached fruition, and twenty-two years later not much has changed in the breadth of offerings around childcare.

The Quality Faculty Work/Life (QFWL) committee conducted an interview on February 27, 2024, with Monica Marsh-Miller, Associate Professor, ECED & Executive Director, KSU Child Development Center (CDC) and Pamela Hutchins, CDC School Director and Associate Lecturer, Early Childhood Education. Like most childcare centers, the CDC operates on a thin budget. Nevertheless, the tuition model allows the CDC to be self-sustaining. However, if additional support were provided, it would expand opportunities to: 1) **offer more scholarships**, since international professors in particular are often surprised to learn how expensive childcare is in the United States, and are not prepared for the work it takes to find appropriate childcare. Indeed, faculty in general are often not aware that they should negotiate for childcare as part of their compensation package; 2) **expand services** to include an infant/toddler room, evening and sick childcare, part-time schedules that align with parents' teaching responsibilities (MTR, TRF, walking in commencement), and childcare coverage during CDC breaks; and 3) **pay teachers more in order to ensure the highest-quality and most diverse range of applicants**. While public school Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers in the region may be earning in the mid-high \$40K range, the currently highest paid CDC teacher is earning \$39K. Part-time teachers at other comparable centers earn \$20/hour, but ours are currently earning about \$16/hr. Part-time student employees, working as teaching assistants, are currently paid \$11-13/hr. However, students know they can make more with non-childcare employers, such as McDonalds, so the CDC is losing many potential student workers to more competitively priced jobs. Dr. Marsh-Miller also mentioned that in previous talks with the administration it was suggested that, every college should contribute \$5K/year, since the CDC serves every college at KSU. Implementing this policy would allow the CDC to serve several more families each year.

At the Regional Campuses, childcare resources vary widely and are sparse. Only two campuses, Stark and Tuscarawas, have access to robust childcare programs. Stark has partnered with a local childcare center and Tuscarawas endorses one. Geauga has a preschool housed on its campus, but there are limited hours, and it is only for children 3-5 years of age. The Geauga campus' Twinsburg Center, as well as Ashtabula, East Liverpool, Salem, and Trumbull do not have any childcare on their campuses, nor have they partnered with or endorsed local childcare centers. A couple of the campuses have done informal surveys and childcare needs center on part-time and emergency services.

3) Faculty Testimonials

The recent COVID pandemic exacerbated and highlighted the lack of and critical need for quality childcare at KSU. Moving into a statewide shutdown, many faculty were put in a scenario of teaching remotely with children of all ages being home at the same time, many with

expectations of remote schoolwork, or some with younger children, finding themselves in situations of trying to juggle childcare and teaching/working.

Early on in the pandemic, one of our KSU faculty members was interviewed on the impact of the COVID-19 related closures on her family and work. One (then) tenure-track faculty member was featured in the *New York Times*, on the topic of COVID hitting working women particularly hard (“Pandemic Could Scar a Generation of Working Mothers” June 30, 2020 *New York Times* by Patricia Cohen and Tiffany Hsu). “As the pandemic upends work and home life, women have carried an outsized share of the burden, more likely to lose a job and more likely to shoulder the load of closed schools and day care. For many working mothers, the gradual reopening won’t solve their problems, but compound them — forcing them out of the labor force or into part-time jobs while increasing their responsibilities at home.”

Many Kent State faculty members are still concerned about childcare resources. In the spring of 2023, we informally asked faculty colleagues anecdotally for their input on the current state of childcare offerings.

1. “I couldn't afford childcare at my own institution—Kent State. The high price of childcare was an economic barrier for me. But, I also heard that KSU childcare employees were underpaid, so, I wrestled with the paradox. I also needed part-time childcare for when I teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and that was not possible with their scheduling structure. I hope KSU offers more accessible childcare in the future. I also hope the climate at Kent State becomes more understanding of academic parents—particularly mothers— who typically shoulder the burdens of childcare. I miss out on research trips and fellowship opportunities because I have two small children and cannot leave my home for weeks and months at a time. This likely effects my chances at getting merit and limits my economic potential and the receipt of other awards down the road.”
Anonymous Faculty, Associate Professor (9 month)
2. “I started working at Kent State August 2016, but my child could not start going to the CDC until August 2017 (the following year), because he was 15 months rather than 18 months old August 2016. It was a stressful struggle to find him high quality alternative childcare locally and I was lucky that the daycare he attended for the first year here was fine: he was safe and cared for, though there was lots of room for improvement with the facility. The CDC closing for a few days just before the academic year starts in August was the most stressful thing: getting ready for classes with no childcare. Kent City Schools have multiple days closed per school year and it does make balancing work and childcare challenging. I’m so grateful Kent State and Kent City School’s Spring Breaks coincide though.” Rebecca Catto, Associate Professor, Sociology & Criminology
3. “In spring 2016, I gave birth to twins and at that point in time could not find affordable, quality daycare for two newborns when I returned from maternity leave. As a result, my spouse left their fulltime job and moved into a part-time, third shift position. They turned into the main childcare provider in our family, while also being a tremendous

strain on me to continue to plug away on tenure track expectations with that particular work-life scenario (particularly with two infants with different sleep cycles). We explored the option of the CDC as the twins got older, but due to the 18-month requirement for fall entry, we would have not qualified for the CDC until the following year, and by that point we had found an alternate solution in-home care with a local childcare provider. We ultimately found this option through a word-of-mouth recommendation, and felt tremendously lucky we were able to take this option. What we loved about this option was full year coverage for my 12-month contract, and also having the flexibility of not paying for childcare the weeks we did not need care (with advanced notice), such as the Winter Break closure or planned family vacations. The CDC unfortunately did not provide a consistent point of childcare for our needs, particularly on a 12 month contract. And then added to this in 2020 with the pandemic shutdown as I prepared my TP file, having a spouse who was by then in a job that was considered an essential worker and losing our main childcare was exceeding stressful. The impact of not having available high- quality childcare has undoubtedly impacted my research output over the last seven years.” Virginia Dressler, Associate Professor, University Libraries

4. “I don’t have any experience with using the CDC and not for lack of interest. It seems like an awesome facility. It is too cost-prohibitive for my family and the rigidity of their schedule was also too difficult to work with. I had been looking for part-time, 2 or 3 days per week of childcare and just couldn’t afford to send either of my children full-time. I have since been able to establish in-home care through family, which poses its own challenges of course. On a broader scale, I’m disappointed that the university hasn’t offered any sort of discount for Kent State employees toward tuition at the CDC, or some other way to support parents beyond the maternity/paternity leave. Permitting telecommuting is certainly helpful for some colleagues with children but not every position lends itself well to working from home. I imagine that the level of support at the university for working parents is possibly a consideration for potential future faculty hires – they may ultimately choose positions at other institutions or industries where there are more family care options. This isn’t a new issue of course but the shortcomings have become more apparent since the start of the pandemic.” Anonymous, FTNTT (12 month).
5. “When my first born was a toddler (2005) I do remember looking into what the options were at the CDC. I had always heard good things about their program. Unfortunately, it was never an option for us because we needed part time care on an unusual day pattern (T, W, R) which was not an option offered....you could do MWF or TR only which I can understand given the nature of how courses are taught (though those course patterns are changing I see a lot of MW classes now). I do not know if the part time offerings have changed, but I found other arrangements and then honestly never looked back into them again after that. When we had our second child 8 years later our part time need was still the TWR and I just sort of assumed it would not be an option. I imagine this would be a problem for students who need less than full time as well or anyone with a variable staff schedule other than M-F.” Anonymous, Tenured (12 month)

6. "The CDC is one of the reasons I am not on the job market and won't be looking for a new job anytime soon, as it is nearly impossible to find high-quality, affordable daycare. That said, the fact that your child has to be 18 months to start meant we had to scramble to find higher cost, lower quality daycare that is far away. In addition, the fact that there isn't daycare over breaks is not the best." Anonymous, Tenured (9 month)

4) Childcare at Peer and Aspirant Institutions

In 2018 the Quality Faculty Work/Life Committee collected data on childcare resources available at peer institutions and discovered a variety of inspiring initiatives. Some take advantage of for-profit close-by facilities, others allocate in-house resources and funds, and yet others use both to fulfill their university's needs. In addition, they vary in their scope of care. Kent State is not alone in its quest for more robust childcare services, and peer and aspirant institutions offer guides for flexible, affordable, and accessible childcare.

Penn State University utilizes both on- and off-campus facilities and provides at least some childcare services on all of its campuses, offers a sliding scale for tuition, enrolls infants as young as six weeks, and is open year-round except for major holidays and one week dedicated to planning. Michigan State University is a self-supporting 501(c)3, enrolls children as young as two weeks, is open all days except for federal holidays, has drop-in availability for those already enrolled, and provides back-up emergency care.

Ohio University has a sliding fee scale and allows for the enrollment of infants at six weeks. Ohio State University's childcare program is a department/division of the Office of Human Resources, enrolls six-week-old infants, provides early intervention and special education services, has a sliding fee scale, and offers services at two of its branch campuses. University of Cincinnati offers childcare in multiple locations including a center at Northern Kentucky University, runs a lab similar to the CDC, and accepts infants at three months. Case Western University partners with KinderCare and provides stipends for up to \$1,000 in travel funds to cover childcare expenses for faculty when attending professional activities.

5) Recommendations

In their report, the US-SG's office (US-SG, 2024) argues that quality daycare is an example of the kind of public and community support that is vitally important for improving parental well-being and in turn, improving the well-being of children in the US. In a section titled, 'What Employers Can Do,' the SG's report recommends; '...expanding programs that support the well-being of parent and caregivers in the workplace,' which includes parental sick leave, flexible work schedules and access to childcare by subsidizing the cost of childcare or by offering high quality on-site childcare. Thus, there is ample evidence to suggest that childcare services which can either be provided by the university or subsidized by the university may play a pivotal role in improving the well-being and productivity of KSU employees who are parents.

The university should take on a larger role in addressing current childcare needs. We recommend the following:

- 1) KSU should establish partnerships with community and local childcare centers. This would be especially important on the Regional Campuses because most do not have any childcare services. Such collaborations could also greatly expand services on the Kent Campus to include childcare for infants to 18-month-olds, evening childcare, and sick childcare.
- 2) KSU should allow childcare to be a reimbursable expense under University Research Council funds.
- 3) KSU should expand services at the CDC and develop tuition waivers and scholarships to help pay childcare costs.
- 4) KSU should develop a web-based resource for parents/caregivers highlighting the resources available to them through the University (e.g. [Family Medical Leave](#), [Child Development Center](#), location of [lactation spaces](#) on campus, [tuition waiver](#) benefit, [Health Savings and Flexible Spending Accounts](#), etc.) and community (e.g. high quality childcare centers in the Kent area, [Kent Family and Social Services](#), [Parks and Recreation offerings](#), etc.). The [Rutger's Caregiver Resource Portal](#) and University of [Michigan Childcare Resources](#) pages, provide excellent examples.
- 5) We also recommend that People, Culture, and Belonging work with QFWL on creating a childcare resource page, developing partnerships with the community, and allowing childcare as an expense for University Research Council funds.

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