

Foreword

In the years immediately after World War II, just 12 percent of American women with children under six years of age were in the labor force. Over the next half-century, that share multiplied more than fivefold. At the same time, the labor-force participation of women with school-age children also soared, from just over one-quarter to slightly more than three-quarters.

The lion's share of those increases occurred during the past generation, but the trends have been evident for long enough that one might reasonably have expected the nation to have responded in significant ways to such a fundamental social transformation. As most other developed nations experienced comparable increases in the number of working mothers, they adopted a variety of public policies that enabled families to gain access to reliable child care. In the United States, however, the role of government at all levels with respect to child care has remained limited, fragmented, and underfunded for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most significant has been the long-standing and still politically potent ambivalence toward mothers in the workforce who have young children.

As a result of this passivity on the part of government, the market for child-care services in the United States leaves much to be desired, and the situation is much more difficult for low-income parents. Although child-care workers receive notoriously poor wages, the cost of care to very low-income parents averages almost one-quarter of their earnings. At a

time when “market-based solutions” have gained political currency in addressing problems confronting the nation’s health-care system, public education, and Social Security, its child-care system provides a sobering example of the consequences of minimal government involvement in the provision of a public good—something that benefits society at large as well as individuals.

Joan Lombardi presents an alternative vision for ensuring American families that their children will have access to high-quality, affordable child care. Formerly the director of the federal Child Care Bureau and deputy assistant secretary for policy and external affairs in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services during the Clinton administration, Lombardi examines effective local and state initiatives as well as the military child-care system. These models help to define policies that she believes would strengthen child care in the United States. In addition to describing new policies and programs, she pays close attention to formulating a political strategy for transforming the way we talk about child care in order to broaden support for a stronger public role.

Lombardi believes that one of the challenges facing those trying to elevate the importance of child care on the national agenda is to shift the perception of the issue as primarily one of parental responsibility to one of common concern as an educational priority. From World War II through the 1996 welfare reform act, child-care policy in the United States has been guided by the needs of adult workers. Child care first became part of the public agenda when the country needed women in the workforce to support domestic production after Pearl Harbor. The war’s conclusion, and the return of men to the workforce and their wives to their homes, caused child-care funding to disappear almost immediately. Significant new federal assistance did not become available again until the passage of the Family Support Act in the late 1980s. Then, once more, the primary concern was to assist adults—this time to encourage them to work rather than remain on welfare. The welfare reform act also provided funding for child-care services to enable welfare recipients and low-income families to work but did not include adequate provisions related to the quality of the child care.

The obvious relationship between child care and the education of preschoolers has been neglected in part because of institutional disconnections, along with political and ideological predilections. While child care is primarily administered by human-service agencies, paid

for primarily by parents, and provided by a range of institutions—including community-based organizations, churches, schools, and small, family-run programs—public schools are supervised by local boards under state oversight and financed mainly through local property taxes.

Lombardi argues that one catalyst for transforming child care into an educational issue may be recent neurobiological research that demonstrated the rapid pace of brain development in a child's early years. Because two out of three children under the age of six now spend at least part of their day in child care, the importance of making sure child-care providers are offering safe, clean, fully staffed services seems evident. Lombardi suggests that if child care came to be perceived as an educational priority and a family support, the public might not be as willing to accept the current market-based system. And while it is difficult to imagine the public school system rapidly subsuming child-care responsibilities, especially for children under four years of age, Lombardi believes that some features of the nation's public support for higher education may be adaptable to child care.

Over the years, as The Century Foundation supported work on inequality, poverty, and welfare, it became clear that the availability of adequate and affordable child care plays a critical role in finding solutions to these problems. The importance of child care to these issues was evident in such works as Blanche Bernstein's *Saving a Generation*, Robert Haveman's *Starting Even*, Richard Nathan's *Turning Promises into Performance*, and *Breaking Away: The Future of Cities*, a collection of essays edited by Julia Vitullo-Martin. Now the increasing information about the importance of early influences on children, particularly in terms of educational achievement, has created a strong interest in further exploration of this subject.

Many of our leaders have struggled for years to find ways of addressing the child-care difficulties that large numbers of their constituents confront. In this book, Joan Lombardi provides them with a road map for beginning the long-overdue process of reversing a history of neglectfulness.

Richard C. Leone, *President*
The Century Foundation

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Reframing Child Care

Whether I was on a plane, attending an event in Washington, D.C., or visiting a welfare office, the stories were always the same, but always deeply personal. They came from fathers as well as mothers. They came from people who made minimum wage and people who worked at the highest rung on the corporate ladder. The words varied, but the message was usually the same: Can I talk to you about my child-care situation? Can you help me?

During the two years I served as the first director of the federal Child Care Bureau, I heard a range of questions and emotions about the care of children while their parents work. A father who called early one Monday morning could barely get the words out: “We just left the baby at the child-care center. How will I know she’s really safe?” When we held a national child-care conference in a downtown hotel, we set up a resource room for experts who were attending from across the country. Throughout the meeting hotel employees kept stopping by, saying, “What is this about? Can I get some information, too? Can I tell you what happened the other day? Last year? With my toddler? With my teen?”

While I was having breakfast before an out-of-town meeting, I spoke with a waitress, a single mom who told me that she just could not get by. Her mother used to “watch the kids” until “they got to be too much for her.” Then her sister took over, but now her sister wants to go back to work, too. Without a family member to help care for her children,

and unable to pay for child care, she said that she may have to go back on welfare.

The questions kept coming. A woman called from the Midwest: “Just how old does a child have to be before you can leave her home alone?” A father from New York talked to me on the train. He had read all the studies and wanted to know about accreditation of child-care centers: What did I think? Was that the answer? A grandmother from California wrote to ask where she could get financial support because she was spending about a third of her wages on child care for her two grandchildren. A friend of mine who had been home with her young daughter for thirteen months told me, “I’ve started to feel as if my brain is melting.” The tension was affecting her marriage. She decided to go back to work part time, but she could not find good child care. She was angry.

By the time my own son turned twelve, he no longer wanted to go to his after-school program because there was not enough going on there to occupy him once he finished his homework. I kept thinking about what an opportunity all that valuable time provided, and I started to look at other programs. There were few choices for this age group; there were transportation issues, and then there would be the summer months. My husband and I were lucky that we had options. But it brought home to me once again, in a very personal way, how hard it is for working parents. Faced with these decisions, they feel *very* alone. Nothing seems to fit their reality. I wondered how long it would take to address this child-care crisis.

Acknowledging the Need

The influx of women into the workforce was one of the most significant social changes of the twentieth century. The number of women in the workforce who have preschool children has increased by more than five times, from 12 percent just after World War II to 64 percent in 1999; at the same time, labor force participation of women with school-age children increased from 27 percent to 78 percent (see Figure 1).¹ Over the past twenty-five years, women with children of all ages have been returning to work, with significant increases in the number of working mothers who have very young children.²

Tragically, this social movement in the United States, in contrast to that in most other developed countries, took place without a corresponding effort to revolutionize the child-care system. A deep ambiva-

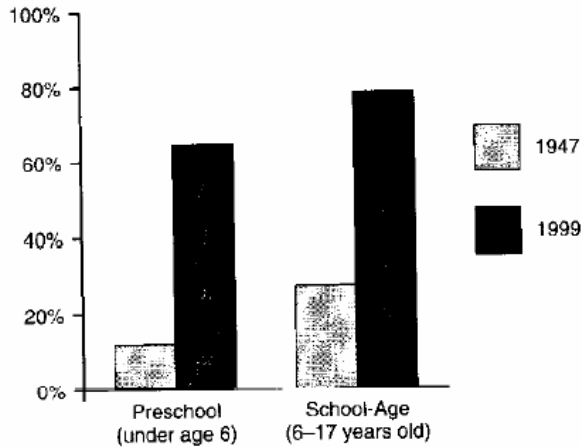


FIGURE 1. Percentages of women in the labor force, by presence and age of youngest child: a Comparison of the years 1947 and 1999.

Included are women ages sixteen or older who work any number of hours for pay or profit, and those who work at least fifteen hours per week without pay for family enterprises.

Data for 1994 and later years are not directly comparable with data for 1993 and earlier years because of introduction of a major redesign in the Current Population Survey (household survey) questionnaire and collection methodology, and the introduction of 1990 census-based population controls, adjusted for estimated undercounts (Anne E. Polivka and Jennifer M. Rothgeb, *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1993, Vol. 116[9], pp. 10-28).

Source: U.S. House of Representatives. Ways and Means Committee, "Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means," *200 Green Book*, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., WMCP: 106-14 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000), Section 9, Table 9.1, pp. 571-73. Figure by Debra Al-Salam.

lence characterized the entrance of women into the labor force, causing the country to close its eyes to the fact that more children, at increasingly younger ages, were spending many hours in settings outside their homes. Despite widespread concern that poor child care might harm children, the public seemed uninterested in doing anything about it. It was as if recognizing the problem and supporting working parents would create a giant magnet, drawing women into the workforce, disarming their maternal instincts, and leaving their children neglected. Rather than responding by helping families and by providing a healthy environment for children to develop, for most of the century the United States tried to avoid the issue, as if hoping the need for child care would go away. But it did not.

Over the years, public policy toward child care has reflected deep feelings about the role of mothers and work. In the early 1900s, the country responded to the needs of poor widows by establishing pensions to support mothers while they remained home with their children. This was the forerunner to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and later Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), commonly known as welfare. Throughout most of the century, child-care support was provided only when it was needed on a temporary basis, such as when women were called to work as part of a national emergency. However, the expectations were always the same: that women would return home and that the need for child care would disappear.

Yet by the late 1960s, more and more women were steadily moving into the workforce. The United States was finally poised to make a serious investment in child care, as other industrialized countries had done. Once again, however, cultural ambivalence about working mothers created an obstacle. In 1971, after years of public debate, President Richard M. Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act, warning that child care would lead to communal child rearing. This single action set the child-care agenda back for decades. While other countries moved ahead, the United States stood still.

In the meantime, the number of women moving into the workforce continued to grow. Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich notes, “Starting in the 1970s, the loss of manufacturing jobs required many women to work in order to maintain family incomes that previously had been sustained by one male worker.”³ At the same time, the lack of adequate child care and other factors contributed to an increase in the number of women on welfare. As working mothers with very young children became more commonplace, the expectation that the country would support poor women to stay home began to change. By the mid-1990s, a demand to “end welfare as we know it” led to the passage of the 1996 welfare-reform bill. Columnist Ellen Goodman called it “the end of a long cultural debate about motherhood as we knew it,”⁴ since for the first time in modern history, the public expected mothers—at least very poor mothers—to work rather than to receive support to stay home. On the other hand, child care was finally beginning to be seen by some as an asset, an important work support for low-income families.

Outside the welfare context, however, poll after poll indicates that public ambivalence toward working mothers with young children continues.⁵ Too often the child-care debate is reduced to the question:

Should mothers work or stay home? We have been forced to talk about work and family in black-and-white terms even though we know the situation is gray. Many women go in and out of the workforce. Sometimes they are home and other times they are working, depending on a number of life situations, including where they live, the ages of their children, the availability of care, and their family goals and needs at the time.

A second and related “either-or” question usually follows: Which has more impact on children, child care or family? As in the “stay at home or work” debate, many people are looking for black or white answers and find in the research whatever they want to see. Common sense tells us that in reality, both influences are important. Just as the quality of family life affects children, so does the place where they may spend twenty to thirty hours or more each week outside the home, especially when they are very young. In a study that asked children what they really think about working parents, Ellen Galinsky argues that it is time to move beyond the either-or debate.⁶ The impact of work on children depends on how their parents feel about their work, whether it spills over into family life, what support is available along the way, and what happens at home when the parents are not working. Furthermore, much depends on the age of the child; yet the debate goes on as if children who are three months old will feel the same effects as children who are thirteen.

More recently, some have assumed that the answer to the child-care dilemma is for mothers to work from home. However, this is only a partial answer (and one often used to deny the realities of child care). As anyone with young children knows, there is only so much work one can sneak in during nap time. Beyond those hours, children need adult supervision and attention. And for many parents—especially for low-income parents—working at home is not an option.

Continuing the either-or debate sidesteps the realities facing most families and contributes to a sense of collective denial regarding the need for child care. A parent’s decision to work is not static, and it does not result in hard-and-fast, wrong or right answers. Indeed, child care cannot be reduced to either-or questions. In the twenty-first century, most children in the United States will be in child care at some time in their lives, probably starting at a young age. Many mothers will work full time, for economic and personal reasons. Their children will need child care. Other mothers and fathers will be able to work part time and

remain home for longer periods of time, depending on family needs and the flexibility of their employers. Yet they too will need child care, even if it is for fewer hours.

Finally, child care is not just an issue for working families. In 1999, about one-third of nonworking American mothers with children under age five used some type of non-parental care, on at least a part-time basis.⁷ Moreover, while children may be in care for less time when they are young, this situation often changes; as they grow older and their mothers return to work, there is an increasing likelihood that children will need care in the afternoons and usually over the summer months.

Child care is here to stay. Some families may need less of it than others, but it is a service that will be used by most children in America. In a landmark study of the science of early childhood released in 2000, the National Research Council noted that it is in child care that “most children first learn to interact with other children on a regular basis, establish bonds with adults other than their parents, receive or fail to receive important inputs for early learning and language development, and experience their initial encounter with a school-like environment.”⁸ Acknowledging the need for child care is a first step toward making change. The next step is to understand how and why the current system is failing.

Recognizing that Market Forces Alone Will Not Work

While much of child care used to be provided free by family members, over the years it has increasingly become a paid service. According to The Urban Institute’s 1977 data from the National Survey of American Families, 48 percent of working families with children under age thirteen had child-care expenses. Working families with younger children used paid care more often, with 60 percent paying for care.⁹ Even when families rely upon relatives, friends, and neighbors, these providers often are paid. Historically, paying for child care has been seen as a private burden, not a public responsibility. It was assumed that market forces would produce what consumers need at a price they could pay if they had the right information to make informed choices. However, the reliance on market forces alone has failed children, families, and the providers who serve them.

A review of child care, conducted by Deborah Vandell and Barbara Wolfe and published in 2000 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, describes market failure as “a situation in which a market left on its own fails to allocate resources efficiently.” The report notes two causes of market failure in child care: parents’ lack of information, and what economists call “externalities,” which means that the benefits of quality care accrue not just to the parents and the child, but to society in general. If the benefits of a service are less apparent to the immediate consumer, there may be less demand for it.¹⁰

Even when families realize the benefits of good care, they often are not able to afford it. Vandell and Wolfe refer to child care as an “imperfect capital market” since “the parents of young children tend to have low incomes relative to their permanent incomes, and they may face borrowing constraints that reduce their ability to pay for high-quality care.” The market failure perpetuates itself because the demand for high-quality care is too low; therefore compensation remains low, and the more qualified staff seek other jobs. This results in declining quality “unless intervention occurs.” From this economic perspective, the clear evidence of market failure in quality child care indicates a need for public-sector intervention. Since the quality of child care affects school readiness, and later school achievement, such intervention is justified as a means to ensure equal opportunity, particularly for low-income families.¹¹

These economic forces in child care have been compared with a three-legged stool. The three legs—availability, affordability, and quality—are interrelated parts of the same system. Whether care is available depends on the supply of providers in a community, access to the care, and whether it is affordable. At the same time, whether families can afford child care depends on the cost of that care and the resources available to help families pay for it. In turn, the quality of care is highly dependent on the cost of providing the service and on what families are willing and able to pay.

The Supply of Child Care Is Not Adequate

Children are cared for in different ways when parents work. Some families manage to care for their children themselves, either by working split shifts or by bringing children to work with them. Yet most families make some non-parental arrangements for their children while they work. Some children are cared for by relatives, others by non-relatives.

Non-relative care can take place in the child's home by caregivers often referred to as "nannies," in other people's homes, often called family child care, and in facilities called child-care centers.

Today there are more than four hundred thousand licensed and regulated child-care centers and homes across the country. This includes more than 113,000 regulated child-care centers and more than three hundred thousand regulated family child-care homes.¹² Since 1991 the number of centers has increased by 24 percent and the number of child-care homes by 19 percent.¹³

Although the supply of child care has increased over the past three decades, the lack of availability of care is still a serious issue, particularly for low-income families. Relatives and friends who can provide child care may be less readily accessible to families than often assumed. One study found that more than 60 percent of welfare families had no friend or relative, inside or outside their immediate household, who could provide child care. Their access to child-care was limited not only by cost but also by transportation issues and lack of adequate supply.¹⁴

Although access to care for preschoolers has improved, there is still a shortage of high-quality child care, particularly for infants, children with special needs, school-age children, and children whose families work evenings, nights, and weekends. A 1997 study documented gaps between the supply and demand of care for infants and school-age children.¹⁵ Schools in low-income communities are far less likely to offer extended-day services.¹⁶ Moreover, two out of five employed Americans work mostly during the evenings or nights, on rotating shifts, or on weekends. Among the top ten occupations projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to experience the most growth from 1996 to 2006, most are service occupations, which employ a large percentage of their workforce in nonstandard hours.¹⁷ The marketplace has not responded to these areas of need.

Good Care Often Is Not Affordable

Even when care is available, the question most families face is whether they can afford it. When young married couples start their new life together, they think about the expenses they will face when children come along. The cost of housing and food often top the list, and saving for a child's college education has become a top priority. Yet for more and more parents, the cost of child care takes a big bite out of family income.

The cost of raising children in the United States has risen in recent years, with a prime cause being the rising cost of child care. For example, child-care costs rose by 5 percent from 1998 to 1999.¹⁸ Child-care costs already had increased by 44 percent between 1985 and 1995.¹⁹ Families pay the lion's share of child-care costs, unlike many other services. Families contribute 60 percent of the total national expenditure for child care, with only 39 percent coming from the government and 1 percent from the private sector. Parent fees make up more than three-fourths of a child-care center's budget, while tuition covers only about one-third of a college's operating expenses.²⁰ The younger the child, the more expensive good child care can be. Yet parents with young children are most likely to be at the lowest point in their earning potential and often cannot afford good care, even when they know it matters and want their children to have the very best.

The cost of care varies by type of care, age of children, and geographic area. Generally, care for infants and toddlers costs more than care for preschoolers and older children. Furthermore, care in urban areas may be more expensive than care in rural communities. In 2000, child-care costs for a four-year-old ranged from \$4,000 to \$10,000 or more a year in urban child-care centers. For families in these areas, the average annual cost of child care exceeded the average annual tuition at a public college in almost every state.²¹ The cost of care for a school-age child can be between \$700 and \$6,600 a year, depending on what costs must be assumed by the program and what in-kind resources are available.²²

Low-income families often cannot afford even basic child care. According to 1995 Census Bureau data, working families paid an average of \$85 per week for child care. Relatively fewer poor families pay for care. However, poor families who paid for care spent five times more of their income on child care than non-poor families, a gap that has persisted since 1987.²³ In the 1997 National Survey of American Families, The Urban Institute found that among working families who pay for care, 27 percent of low-earning families, compared with only 1 percent of higher-earning families, spend more than one-fifth of their earnings on child care. Very low-income families pay on average almost one-quarter of their earnings for child care (see Figure 2).²⁴

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Finance Committee in March 2002, a thirty-year-old single mother from Florida described the child-care dilemma she was facing:

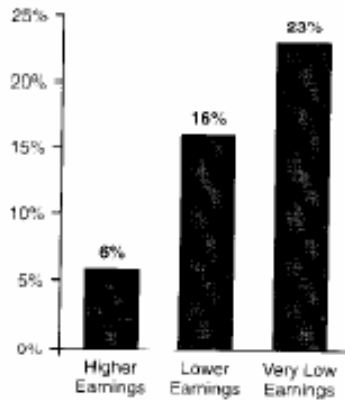


FIGURE 2. *Child-care expenses as a percentage of family earnings (among families who pay for care).*

“Higher Earnings” is more than 200 percent of poverty; “Lower Earnings” is less than 200 percent of poverty; and “Very Low Earnings” is less than the poverty level. Each percentage shown is the average of the percentage of earnings that each family in that group pays for care. This yields results different from the aggregate approach to computing percentages (aggregate expenses divided by aggregate earnings, or income across a group).

Source: Linda Giannarelli and James Barsimantov, “Child Care Expenses of America’s Families,” Occasional Paper No. 40, *Assessing the New Federalism* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, December 200), pp. 7,9, based on data from the 1977 National Survey of America’s Families.

I work very hard to provide a safe and stable environment for myself and my child while struggling to work and go to college. . . . Now I am confronted with a new obstacle. . . . My annual income is \$13,500 per year . . . my transitional child care benefit ended . . . my income still places me well within Florida’s eligibility level for child-care assistance; . . . however, due to lack of funds in Florida this year, my daughter and I have been placed on a waiting list (along with over 46,000 other families in the state). . . . I cannot afford to pay full child-care fees so that I can work, as my weekly child-care expenses total over 42 percent of my weekly take-home pay.²⁵

This story reflects the dilemma of thousands of other families across the country. In 1997, U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin remarked, “In many states, a single parent leaving welfare to enter the workforce, after you take into account losing government benefits and the cost of child care, will see his or her income increase by less than fifty cents for each additional dollar earned.”²⁶ Child-care expenses therefore may

cause many families to remain in poverty. One estimate indicates that when income is adjusted for child-care expenses, 1.9 million additional persons—of whom more than one million are children—are “thrown into poverty.”²⁷

Moreover, child-care expenses remain an issue for families within a wide range of income levels—even families earning twice the minimum wage, with modest wages of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year, face incredible challenges in paying for care, particularly if they have more than one child. For example, in California, the average cost of full-time care in a licensed center in 1999 for a child under two years of age was \$7,020 almost one-quarter of the annual gross income of a family earning \$30,000 a year, and 68 percent of a minimum-wage income. Similar costs were reported coast to coast, from Boston to Seattle.²⁸

The Quality of Care Is Strained by Low Wages

The cost of care is directly related to its quality, and the key to quality is the staff. Yet for decades child care has been “subsidized” by an underpaid workforce. Now that workforce is shrinking dramatically. Directors of child-care centers across the country find themselves hiring from a pool of applicants whom they would have considered unqualified only a few years ago. Far too many programs are experiencing record turnover, while still others have been forced to close their doors because of their inability to hire staff.²⁹ Parents are having trouble finding home providers in their neighborhoods. This is not surprising, when child-care providers commonly earn half of what kindergarten teachers earn, even when they have the same credentials.

In 1999 only fifteen occupations had median wages lower than child-care workers; even service-station attendants, messengers, and food services earned higher wages than child-care workers, who earned on average \$7.42 an hour. Family child-care workers earned even less, about \$4.82 an hour, in a typical fifty-five-hour week. Child-care workers classified as preschool teachers earned \$9.43 an hour, but less than half a kindergarten teacher’s average salary of \$24.51 an hour (see Figure 3).³⁰ Low wages and limited health and retirement benefits have come to characterize child care throughout the United States.

Since compensation has not even kept up with inflation in many places, child-care providers are seeking other jobs. Low wages and poor job mobility serve to limit the number of people entering the child-care field. As communities struggle to find qualified teachers for public-

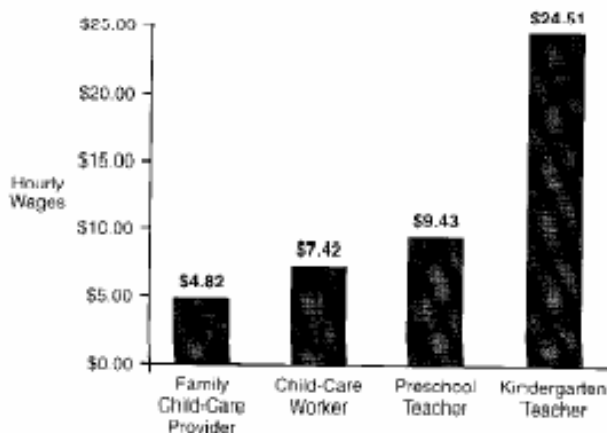


FIGURE 3. *Child-care workforce earnings in perspective: A comparison of mean hourly wages, by child-care job.*

The titles “child care worker” and “Preschool teachers” are job titles defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The median weekly earnings for family child-care providers are \$265.00, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS). The hourly earnings of \$4.82 reflects a fifty-five-hour week, the typical work week for family child-care providers. Because the sample size of family child-care providers in the CPS is small, an increase from year to year may reflect a change in the sample and not an actual increase in earnings.

Source: Center for the Child Care Workforce, *Current Data on Child Care Salaries and Benefits in the United States*, Washington, D.C., March 2001, based on 1999 data from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

school classrooms, where salaries far exceed child-care compensation levels, the issue of recruiting and retaining child-care staff has become a crisis. In a full-employment economy, women have many other career options. Directors of child-care programs struggle to increase wages, but they fear the increases will drive up prices and make services even less affordable.

The educational background of child-care teaching staff and the arrangements of their work environment are essential determinants of the quality of the services children receive. The most important pre-dictor of the quality of care, in the adult work environment, is staff wages. A series of studies over the past two decades documents the crisis in child-care staffing. One study in the late 1980s found that wages

Were very low and that staff turnover had nearly tripled, from 15 percent in 1977 to 41 percent in 1988.³¹ Six years later, a study of child care in four states reported that donations and “forgone earnings” accounted for more than one-fourth of the full cost of care. Higher-quality programs paid workers more than lower-quality programs, but even these still paid below market wages. Foregone earnings were even greater in programs serving infants. The study called for increased investments in child-care staff to assure a skilled and stable workforce.³²

In 1998 another study found that child-care wages had remained stagnant over the past decade, and high turnover continued to threaten program quality. On average, the highest-paid teaching assistant in child care earned \$12,250. Real wages improved little during the decade, and even the most highly paid teachers made only modest gains.³³ The study also found that more child-care centers received public dollars in 1997 than in 1988, allowing them to assist low-income families with child-care costs. However, because this increased public funding was spent to help families pay for care, and rarely targeted to improve quality or increase compensation, it has not resulted in better wages or lower staff turnover. In fact, centers paying the lowest wages were receiving the greatest increases in public subsidies. Furthermore, child-care centers continued to experience very high turnover of teaching staff, threatening their ability to offer good, consistent services to children. More than one-quarter of the child-care teachers, and more than one-third of the assistants, had left their jobs in the previous year—at a time when the demand for their services had grown dramatically.³⁴

More recently, in 2001, the first large-scale longitudinal study, based on observations of quality in the same child-care centers over a period of six years, found that the workforce teaching in child care is alarmingly unstable. Seventy-six percent of all teaching staff employed in centers in 1996, and 82 percent of those in 1994, were no longer on the job in 2000. Directors reported having to fill positions with staff who were less qualified than in previous years. Teaching staff reported that high turnover among their colleagues harmed their ability to do their jobs.³⁵

A Strong Infrastructure is Needed to Support Quality

Along with the need to improve compensation, investments are needed in such key elements of the child-care infrastructure as licensing and enforcement, consumer education, and professional preparation.

In a nation interested in consumer protections, there is not even a basic assurance of safety for all children in child care. Licensing has traditionally been a state and local function. Despite efforts during the 1970s, national standards have never been implemented, even for programs receiving federal money. As a result, there is wide variation in what state licensing of child care covers and how regulations are enforced. The purpose of child-care licensing is to protect the health, safety, and well-being of children receiving care away from their homes and families.³⁶ Although licensing is a basic element in structuring a high-quality system, it only serves as a floor.

State requirements for child care vary. For example, while some states regulate such key elements as group size or staff training, others have few, if any, such requirements. As of January 2002, more than half the states required no pre-service training for teachers in child care, and only a dozen states required pre-service training for family child-care providers. In fact, eleven states allowed directors who had no pre-service training to run child-care programs, even though they could be in charge of ensuring the well being of dozens or hundreds of young children.³⁷ Some states do not even regulate basic safety issues such as background checks for staff. These minimum licensing requirements send the wrong message regarding the need for more qualified staff, and can have a chilling effect on efforts to improve the quality of child care.

Moreover, while recommended practice is to regulate all nonfamily providers who care for children outside the child's home, almost all states exempt some types of out-of-home providers from regulation. For example, some states exempt certain types of family child care, religious-based care, school-based care, or recreational care. Only two states regulate all of the provider types.³⁸ It has been estimated that between 82 and 90 percent of family child-care homes in the United States are unregulated, some legally and others illegally.³⁹ When using federal funds, states must apply some level of health and safety standards even for exempt care. However, more than 80 percent of the states rely on self-certification of health and safety standards for such exempt providers.⁴⁰

Even when standards include all key elements and allow few exemptions, poor enforcement can undermine regulatory effort and threaten the health and safety of children. Proper enforcement requires not only sufficient numbers of competent, well-trained licensing staff who under-

stand the principles of the regulatory system, but also strong administrative support and teamwork between licensing and legal staff.⁴¹ The military child-care system, which has been hailed as a model for the country, specifies four unannounced visits by monitors each year. Although states have made improvements in the number of monitoring visits they make to child-care programs, many states monitor programs once a year or less.⁴² No state appears to meet the military standard.

Inspectors who are responsible for monitoring child-care programs often have such heavy caseloads that they lack the time to probe for serious problems, to devise sensible solutions, or to take strong enforcement action. Furthermore, they often have little choice of intermediate action between the extremes of closing a program and just giving it a warning.⁴³ Finally, child-care inspectors may lack either the training or the time to provide the type of technical assistance or follow-up that programs may need to come into compliance. Only a handful of states follow the recommended practice of providing a minimum of twenty-four hours of training for licensing staff or maintaining caseloads at the recommended levels.⁴⁴

Along with these licensing issues, the lack of consumer information and support continues to plague the child-care system and the families it serves. Good consumer information is critical to making the child-care market function effectively. Without adequate information, parents are not able to make informed choices, thereby limiting their access to the market. Lack of funding limits the support available to parents to help them make this important decision about their children.

Over the past few decades, more than eight hundred Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies have been established in communities across the country to provide consumer education to parents and overall support to the child-care community.⁴⁵ However, these agencies, like the rest of the child-care delivery system, have faced serious funding shortages. For example, forty-one states contracted with CCR&Rs in 1997 to provide some or all of the consumer education for parents using subsidies, yet they were insufficiently funded to provide consumer education to most families in need.⁴⁶ In addition to providing basic information to parents, most CCR&Rs make referrals, maintain databases, train providers, and help provide a range of other services to the community, yet often they are not fully supported to provide these services.

While some employers provide referrals for their employees, low-income families often have the least access to such services, particularly

if they are not connected to the welfare system. These parents often do not have access to consumer education beyond a basic pamphlet. Furthermore, personal time constraints and transportation difficulties often limit parents' ability to visit child-care providers before making a choice.⁴⁷

Finally, the United States does not have an adequate training system to prepare child-care providers or program administrators. Although literally hundreds of teacher-training programs exist in community colleges and higher-education institutions, collectively the country has been slow in responding to the diverse needs of child care such as specialized training for infant care, school-age care, family child care, and center directors. The system of early-childhood professional preparation is characterized by "fragmentation, a shortage of qualified personnel, inadequate career ladders, high turnover, too many barriers and too few incentives for training, and a lack of consumer demand for well-trained personnel."⁴⁸ Three-fourths of the early-childhood center directors profiled in one study indicated that they were not prepared for the kinds of issues they encountered when they first became directors.⁴⁹

Other reports reflected similar findings. For example, the first national study of training and career development in early care and education found that there was no comprehensive system to train practitioners. Training was difficult to obtain and often did not provide college credit. The lack of a coherent system hindered career mobility. Furthermore, there was a lack of incentives for training, particularly funds for training and compensation and minimum standards for staffing.⁵⁰

Despite some investments in recent years, support for a responsive professional development system continues to fall short. One study found that public schools allocate 9 percent of their professional-development funds for college coursework, compared with less than 1 percent allocated by child-care centers. Furthermore, child-care teachers spent a higher percentage of their salaries on professional development than their public-school peers.⁵¹

In summary, in the United States, unlike other industrialized countries, the public response to the need for child care has fallen short. Even though child-care assistance to low-income working families has more than doubled over the past five years, the vast majority of eligible families are still left out in the cold. Furthermore, middle-income families have been almost entirely ignored. Although a tax credit is available to all working families, it provides too little, too late. Families with incomes

in the middle range, between approximately \$17,000 and about \$50,000, benefit little from child-care policies.

At the same time, investments in quality and infrastructure that could benefit all children or that could be targeted to those in greatest need have been minimal. The United States invests just pennies per child per day to ensure the quality of care for children. Most families go without consumer information. Most providers have limited access to good training. Most policy-makers have very little coordinated data to help them plan and build a system of care. Reliance on a market-based system of financing child care simply is not working.

Using Traditional Values to Make Change

In her review of social change and the family, research psychologist Arlene Skolnick notes that “as the world changes, prevailing cultural norms and understandings and practices are disrupted long before new ones have taken place.” She discusses three stages of social and cultural transformation. In the first stage, individuals struggle with changes and experience personal and family stress. In the second stage, personal problems become public issues as society collectively struggles with issues brought about by these changes. Public discourse reflects a lack of consensus, and social and political conflicts arise surrounding the issues. Finally, a restabilization occurs in the third stage as a new consensus forms to reconcile older values with new realities.⁵²

This theory of change can be applied to the child-care debate. For decades, individual families have been struggling to try to make ends meet. Women and men have been attempting to define themselves and their roles in the family and in society. This has caused tension in the family and pressure to cope with these changes. Over the years, public dialogue about these issues has escalated, with each side passionately holding to its position. In the meantime, public policies have not changed much. We appear to be stuck in stage two, not able to reconcile traditional values with new realities. One side argues that families have an obligation to care for their own children, and the other that society has an obligation to help families because of society’s broad interest in raising good citizens. This has been referred to as a values gap.⁵³

“Championing child care” has been like swimming upstream.⁵⁴ Anyone who has lived through the struggles to pass comprehensive child-care legislation has felt the strong current pulling in the opposite

direction. Naturally, all social movements contain such a struggle. Yet I have often felt that something more is at play here, something that we should pay attention to: throughout the child-care debate, a set of values that the country holds dear has been used to criticize child care and at other times has been largely ignored. Among others, these values include the importance of the family, a high regard for education, a goal of equality, and a commitment to citizenship. In reality, all of these values are inherent in good child care as well as essential to developing a good child-care system. It is time we put these values to work as instruments of change.

The Importance of Family

In the debate over child care, perhaps no word has been tossed around more than “family,” especially when it is used to affirm the value of “mothering.” Conservatives have claimed that child care is “anti-family.” They ask mothers, “Would you rather work or have someone else raise your children?” The implication of this question is that if you work outside your home and use child care for part of the day, then somehow, someone else is raising your children. On the other hand, liberals have too often downplayed the importance and value of mothering in their quest to support mothers who choose to work.

We have to change this debate in three ways. First, we must be more direct in saying that good child care is good for families. We have equivocated too long on this point, worried that we play into the hands of critics who make us feel we are turning our children over to other people to raise or that we are saying that all families need to put their children in care. Neither statement is true. The truth is that good family-centered care promotes parenting. Child-care providers are not substitutes for parents; they are supplements—like extended family members. They can reinforce the bond between parents and children. Furthermore, good consistent care provides support for the family, alleviating stress and helping the family function as a team. Moreover, since child-care providers come into contact with families on a daily basis, they can provide a wealth of information on parenting—something that many liberals and conservatives agree is important.

One reason that many of us have been reluctant to say that child care can be good for families is that we are still struggling with how best to support the parental role. In their book, *Sharing the Caring*, Amy Dombro and Patty Bryan talk about the emotions surrounding child care.⁵⁵

Parents who love and care for their children may find it difficult to “share” this sense of affection with others, particularly when children are very young and are in the care of strangers. On the other hand, child-care providers often develop deep feelings for the children in their care and may feel ambivalence about how parents are responding to their children’s needs. Talking more openly about the goal of child care as a family support, rather than seeing it as a substitute, can contribute to change.

Second, we must stand up for the value of caring. In many ways the rhetoric around “family” has focused on mothering (although the fathers’ movement has started to change this). Because many women have been afraid to live identified as mothers only, we have devalued the importance of the rearing role. Instead we should view it as an important social value and public good. In her book *Care and Equality*, Mona Harrington argues that liberals should “embrace an ethic of care.” Although she says that “it should be an ethic of care that does not unfairly burden women,” it should be “an ethic that recognizes the moral values that motherhood has represented.”⁵⁶ By valuing the caring role, we also can help move toward providing better support to others who are helping us care for our children.

Third, we must use the power of parenthood to help make change. A poll released in 2000 found that when parents step into the voting booth, they think of themselves as parents significantly more often than they view themselves as members of any other traditional political-interest group. Both mothers and fathers put “balancing work and family” at the top of their list. Similarly, another poll the same year showed that the vast majority of women see balancing work and family as a critical concern.⁵⁸ In May 2000, the Million Mom March in Washington, D.C., gave mothers an opportunity to claim their right to stand up for their children. In one of the few such events since the women’s movement began, women publicly acknowledged and used their “mother-ness” as an instrument for change. Rather than disassociating themselves from their motherhood in fear that it would be used as a stereotype to limit their options, they embraced it as a value.

Today, women can use their power as mothers to make change while not losing their sense of equality. Moreover, women do not have to do it alone. Increasingly, fathers are joining in as full partners in the care of their children, standing up for the important role of fatherhood. If our ambivalence about working mothers is driven by our concern that child care is not good, we have to work to make it better. We have to

put an old tried-and-true value—our parental instincts—to work to fit the new realities and make child care the very best system it can become.

The High Regard for Education

The importance of education is a cornerstone of the American value system. Since colonial days, education has been seen as being in the best interest of the child and community. Public support for education became as American as apple pie. As the nation faced competition from other countries, the drumbeat for education reform grew. On the other hand, the care of children outside school remained a private issue. Despite the realities of modern America, the care and education of children remained separate and unrelated issues. The school bell rang, and children went home to empty houses. The summer began without fields to plow, but schools remained empty.

In part the disjuncture between child care and education grew out of the fact that public education began at a time when most mothers were home and before extended families spread across state lines. But the continued disconnection between care and education results largely from political and ideological biases. However, at the approach of the millennium there were some signs of change. The numbers of children in child care had swelled to the point where they no longer could be easily ignored. At the same time, public discussion of education intensified as test scores indicated that large numbers of children were not able to meet minimum standards of performance.

After-school programs and early education became popular issues, which coincided with increases in the numbers of children already enrolled in these programs because their mothers were working. Research on early education produced evidence that young children could spend time outside the home for part of the day without their development being harmed. Furthermore, this research opened a window on the potential benefits of out-of-home care for child development. Knowledge of how children learn demonstrated that for young children, caring and educating are inseparable.⁵⁹

In recent years, data on the benefits of good child care have been mounting. While the debate about what the research actually says has not been free from controversy, for methodological and ideological reasons, by and large an increasing number of studies point to the fact that good care matters. Starting with a comprehensive study on early care launched by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development,

opment (NICHD) in 1991,⁶⁰ research shows that child care in and of itself does not harm children. In fact, for low-income children especially, good care can be a benefit in the long run. Naturally, if the care is not good, and if the children are very young and in care for long hours, it can have an adverse effect. That is exactly why we need to make improvements, particularly when welfare reform in a number of states now requires women with children under age one to work.

The NICHD study and other studies indicate that the quality of care affects school readiness. One study released in 1999 found that children who attended higher-quality child care did better in math and language in elementary school.⁶¹ Another study released in the same year found that children who had been in enriched child care did better in reading and math in the primary grades and into adulthood.⁶² Moreover, other evidence, from scientific studies of the brain to high-level academic panels on precursors to literacy, all point to the importance of the early years and the quality of experiences both at home and in child care.

The evidence regarding the importance of school-age child-care programs to academic achievement is beginning to emerge.⁶³ New findings continue to document what most middle-class families, who ferry their children from music lessons to sporting events, always have known: A well-rounded education includes enriched activities after school.

Even without the benefit of research, it is clear that good places for children are essential to working families. If the research begins to indicate poor results from child care, then we have to use that research and the value we place on education to make things better for children. If the research shows no difference in the effects of child care, then we have to explore what we can do to take advantage of the opportunities that we have while children are in care. With or without the research, child care is where children will be spending their days while parents work. The question is no longer whether we should invest in child care, but rather under what conditions we can help children learn and grow.

The Assurance of Equal Access

The third value that the United States has strived to uphold is equality, particularly equal access to a good education. Because good child care is highly dependent on private means, families do not have equal access to high-quality child-care options for their children. For young children, the gap in access to good preschool services between families at higher and lower income levels means that inequality of education

begins at an early age. At the same time, children in low-income neighborhoods do not have access to the same type of after-school opportunities that have always been open to upper-income families. This is particularly serious because art, music, and gym classes are diminishing in many public schools. Increasingly, a well-rounded education seems out of reach for the children of low-income working families.

For years, experts have been calling for increased public support of child care. A review of child-care coverage in U.S. newspapers found that the message “government should help pay for child care” was the most frequently used “frame” in substantive newspaper articles about child care published from 1994 to 1998.⁶⁴ Much less frequent were messages about the importance of the early years to child development and other education themes. Furthermore, equity of access to an educational opportunity was not even on the list of messages. Yet the goal of equity is an important value and one that is undermined by a reliance on market forces alone.

Equal access to a good education includes access to good child care Before children enter school, after school, and during the summer. Children whose parents earn \$15,000 a year cannot compete with children whose parents can afford to pay that same amount of money for the care of their children. Unlike public education, child care will continue to be delivered through a diverse set of private providers. However, additional public support is needed to balance a family’s ability to pay with public investments in quality. Only such a third-party payment system will provide equal access to quality services for all families. The importance of equal access is an argument that should help support a shift from a private fee system to a system that offers more public support.

The Commitment to Citizenship

Fourth, we can help renew our communities through civic action on child-care issues. During the past decade there has been a growing concern about the state of democracy and the involvement of citizens at all levels. The National Commission on Civic Renewal notes that “too many of us have become passive and disengaged. Too many of us lack confidence in our capacity to make basic moral and civic judgments, to join with our neighbors to do the work of the community.”⁶⁵ More than 85 percent of all Americans believe that disconnection is at the heart of our most serious social problems.⁶⁶

Citizenship is a value as old as America: it is the basis of self-government. When citizens take responsibility for improving the conditions of their lives, they strengthen their sense of power and their conviction that they can make a difference.⁶⁷ In a 1999 poll on civic action, 72 percent of the respondents stated that America's social problems are best addressed when government, religious, and charitable organizations collaborate.⁶⁸

The good news is that there is a growing belief in community service and a renewed commitment to volunteering. More than half of the adult population volunteered nearly 20 billion hours in 1998. Many of those who currently volunteer indicate that they would be interested in becoming more involved. The participation of senior volunteers has gone up since 1995, a particularly promising trend given the aging population.⁶⁹ Furthermore, interviews commissioned by the League of Women Voters indicate that a focus on children and youth appears to be a motivating force to engage Americans in more community involvement.⁷⁰

Civic action in child care is a rather recent trend. Although most funding for child care comes from the federal or state level, child care, like politics, is a very local issue since it is delivered in neighborhoods and towns. By promoting community service, business involvement, and parent and senior citizen participation in child care, we will be putting a traditional American value to work for change.

Putting It All Together: Promising Images for a New Era

Child care today is at an important crossroads. It took more than a century for child care to be recognized as a key support for America's poor working families. Yet it was only toward the end of the twentieth century that the potential of child care as an educational opportunity for children was beginning to be recognized. The future of child care rests on our ability to view it as a potential asset for children, families, and communities, rather than seeing it as a deficit. As the use of child care becomes a fact of life for more families, we need new ways of thinking to help us design child-care services that can respond to the needs of parents as well as children.

Over the past decade a new domestic-policy framework has been emerging, one that rests on the concept of "asset development" as a

condition for economic security and opportunity for all.⁷¹ Various types of assets provide opportunities in many ways. Assets provide financial or other resources needed to achieve a specific objective, such as to own a home, get a better job, or start a business. They also empower individuals by giving them hope, a goal to achieve, the impetus to plan and work toward a better future, and a sense of connection. Some assets affect the lives of individual, and others the entire community or future generations.⁷²

Child care is related to asset development in several ways. First, when the public assures affordable child care as a work support, it enables young working parents, particularly low-income parents, to get, keep, and even enhance what may be their most important asset, a secure means of income and benefits from a job. Without affordable child care, parents have little hope of building financial assets such as a rainy-day fund for an emergency or a down payment on a home, since child-care expenses are a significant drain on the family budget. In other words, when the public assures affordable child care, it removes a barrier to the accumulation of resources, which in turn leads to greater opportunities.

At the same time, by providing a good educational environment for children, child care helps build human capital. As increasing numbers of young children spend time in child care, these settings provide an opportunity to promote healthy child development and to reach out to parents with information and support. As more and more school-age children and young adolescents participate in programs after school, new opportunities open to promote healthy youth development. Such investments in human capital can grow over time and lead to improvements in the long-term economic prospects of children, particularly those from low-income communities. Finally, as more citizens help to develop and support a system of care in their communities, the improved and expanded child-care system itself becomes a community asset that supports economic development and civic involvement. It is against this positive framework that new images for child care can emerge.

I believe there are at least seven emerging principles that should shape our new image of child care.

First, child care is an opportunity. The reality is that children in the United States spend many hours in out-of-home settings. The argument for investing is straightforward. It is just plain common sense to take advan-

tage of the opportunity that child care provides to promote education and to reach out to parents.

Second, regardless of the age of the child and the setting, child care is not exclusively a “home” nor a “school.” Child care is a “third setting” that has value in and of itself. Since children spend long hours in care, it must reflect the comfort of home, yet it must include experiences to promote education. The educational experiences that children have in child care are not a substitute for school, but rather should complement and support the entrance into school or the regular school day. The goal of education in child care should be broadly defined, reflecting a developmental approach to learning that integrates the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children at each stage of their lives.

Third, child care for young children is not the same as child care for school-age children. Like the little red schoolhouse, the term “child care” has been used to refer to services for children from birth through early adolescence. In the new era, we need to differentiate our image of child care for younger children from that for school-age children, since planning, staffing, and oversight differ among these developmental stages.

Fourth, the heart of any good child-care program is the relationship between the children and the provider; and the relationship between the provider and the parents. For young children as well as school-age children, child care must include supportive adults who help guide and mentor children while they learn. Providers themselves must be supported with adequate working conditions so that they in turn have the resources to nurture the development of children and support the family.

Fifth, child care is not an isolated service for children; rather it should be seen as a hub of support for families. Child-care providers cannot work in isolation from the families they serve nor from the communities where they live. Instead, child care can serve as a doorway for delivery of a range of services that families need. In addition, child care must reflect the diverse needs of families, which means that a range of good choices must be offered.

Sixth, child care is not a private responsibility, but must be a public service. Like any public utility, child care requires public financing to provide

access to all families. It cannot continue to be funded by parents alone or financed on the backs of child-care providers. We need an infusion of public support to make it work.

Seventh, because child care support children and families, it is everyone's business to get involved. Child care is a community-building endeavor that can help promote greater civic engagement and create stronger links between cultures and across the generations.

Based on these principles, three new images come to mind when I think of child care. I will refer to these as “a new beginning,” “the new neighborhood,” and “the caring community.”

It is difficult for a single metaphor or any new term to capture what we really want child care for young children and families to look like. Old images and old words such as nursery school, preschool, or day care just do not seem to fit. Yet new words are still evolving. In the meantime, I use the image of a “good beginning” because I think that is what relationships that blend caring, teaching, and nurturing. We want young children to get off to a good start with support from their family and other caregivers.

Traditionally, the neighborhood is a place where school-age children “hang out,” socialize, and participate in activities that help round out their education. Sometimes these activities take place in the home, and other times in the school or the surrounding community. These activities include such things as music, art, and other lessons, clubs, sports, reading, playing games, and doing homework. In the old neighborhood there were always people around who cared: parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbors. The “new neighborhood” includes these influences, activities, and more.

The image of a “caring community” reflects the full range of supports—both formal and informal—that surround neighborhood programs. Every community needs a focal point of support services, such as information and referral for families. But services alone are not enough. Involved citizens, from parents to police to pediatricians, must be part of the process of making child care work. Furthermore, in years gone by, the old and the young came together naturally within families. In the “caring community” of the future, we have to recreate these linkages across the generations by engaging the elderly in the care of children.

This book is about values, possibilities, and the need for a national commitment. It is about reframing child care to incorporate these new principles and images. In Chapter 2, I look back to the twentieth century, tracing the history of child care as it evolved from being regarded as a deficit to being recognized as a potential asset, particularly as it became to be seen as an important work support for low-income families. In Chapters 3 and 4, I lay out a framework for redesigning child care as an educational opportunity and family support. I recommend building on existing services to create neighborhood early-learning and after-school programs. Such programs would be designed to promote child development while supporting working families. In Chapter 5, I turn to the community level, describing the network of activities that must be in place to provide a strong infrastructure to ensure quality, and examining the growing role of volunteerism and other civic actions on behalf of children in care. Using this framework, I describe some of the changes taking place across the country that seem to reflect pieces of this emerging vision.

In conclusion, in Chapter 6, I highlight the new thinking about financing child care and present six recommendations for increased public investment to achieve equal access to good early-education and after-school services. Rather than relying largely on parent fees and a marketplace approach, the United States must make a serious commitment to public financing of child care. A significant share of new public investments should take the form of “third-party payments” directly to programs and providers, supporting improvements in quality without raising fees to parents. Like higher education, transportation, and other public systems, the early-education and after-school system should include a mix of portable aid to families and quality assurances for programs and infrastructure. Financial assistance to families should include support to remain home with a newborn child, as well as expanded direct subsidy and tax support to pay for care. Direct support should be provided to improve programs, build infrastructure, and help prepare a workforce that will fit the new realities of child care.

There is a growing realization that the care of children outside the home is a fact of life for millions of children. For most mothers, the choice is no longer as simple as going to work or staying home. Most women go in and out of the workforce, with periods of part-time and full-time employment. Mothers and fathers often take turns, sharing responsibility, balancing work and family. However, most poor women

have no choice, and they have very little flexibility either at home or at work. It is their children who are often at risk for educational failure, who suffer the most when child care is of poor quality, and who reap the greatest benefit when provided an enriched environment while their parents work.

The need for good child care is permanent. No end of poverty or end of war will make it go away. If we as a nation are concerned about the well-being of children, then we have to put that well-intentioned concern into action—by viewing child care not only as a work support but also as an opportunity that can enhance the health of children, improve their education, support their families, and help build a sense of community that will benefit us all.

The new framework for child care is not that of a crisis or a deficit, a problem or a safety hazard. Instead child care can be an asset that leads to new opportunities. It is time for policy-makers and the American public to embrace child care and allow it to become all it can be. It is time to allow parents the flexibility and resources they need to be successful at work and at home. The vast majority of children will spend at least some time in child care during their lifetimes. We all have to make sure it is time well spent.