



AGENDA FOR CHILDREN

A VOICE FOR LOUISIANA'S CHILDREN

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Child Care Gaps in Louisiana Affect Families and Businesses

NEW ORLEANS— Seventy-eight percent (78%) of Louisiana's children under the age of five regularly attend some form of non-parental child care. These children are cared for in a range of settings; including child care centers, family child care homes, in-home providers (a.k.a. "nannies"), Head Start sites, and public pre-kindergarten programs. The percent of Louisiana's young children using child care is significantly higher than the national average of 65%, according to a parish-by-parish report issued by Agenda for Children, Louisiana's statewide child advocacy organization.

With over 499,000 Louisiana children under 13 living in homes where there is no "stay-at-home" parent, child care programs provide essential support for working parents, while at the same time providing for the healthy growth and development of the children in their care.

The *2006 Louisiana KIDS COUNT Special Report on Child Care*, produced by Agenda for Children, documents the impact, the successes, and the challenges of child care and early education in our state. The parish-by-parish profiles show child care capacity, subsidy payments, child care costs, and family income data. In a state that consistently ranks 49th in child poverty, child care is an essential support for families struggling to make ends meet. Yet, high quality care is out of reach for many working families, due to issues of affordability, access, and other barriers such as a severe scarcity of care for infants and toddlers, as well as children with special needs.

"Child care costs and concerns about the quality of care contribute to workforce shortages, job turnover, and, in the storm-impacted areas, the pace of repopulation," says Judy Watts, President/CEO of Agenda for Children.

Other features of the report show that:

- Louisiana lost hundreds of child care facilities pursuant to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
- The mean hourly wage for a child care worker in Louisiana is \$6.55, the lowest in the nation
- Each child care job generates 1.27 jobs in the larger economy, indicating that the child care industry is an essential component of the state's economic infrastructure
- A family earning the median income in Louisiana would spend 13% of its income on center-based child care for just one child. Nationally, the average family spends just 7% of its income on child care costs.
- The overarching barrier to improving the quality of child care in Louisiana is the persistence of low wages in the industry

The report also features news of successful programs and promising practices on the horizon. The state's Department of Social Services (DSS) is preparing to implement a Quality Rating System for child care centers that will provide guidance for parents and incentives for providers.

The success of the LA-4 pre-kindergarten programs in the schools is featured, as well as upcoming assistance aimed at helping child care centers recover from the 2005 hurricanes.

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Agenda for Children is a statewide child advocacy organization working to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. For more information, or to obtain a copy of the report, contact Judy Watts or Teresa Falgoust at 504-586-8509. The report is also available online at <http://www.agendaforchildren.org/documents/childcarereport.pdf>.