

Can Child-Care Benefits Keep Teachers in the Classroom?

Some school districts are finding a payoff in providing child care for educators

By **Sarah D. Sparks**

January 23, 2018

While school initiatives to boost teacher retention tend to focus on mentoring, instructional coaching, or salary bonuses, they rarely address one of the most common reasons teachers leave: family.

Yet a handful of districts nationwide have found that the upfront costs of providing child care for their teachers pay for themselves in greater teacher flexibility and retention.

"This is a huge need of that workforce," said Taryn Morrissey, an associate professor of public policy at American University who studies child-care and labor issues. "Teaching is actually not as family friendly a position as one might imagine. Your hours might match your kids' hours when you have school-age kids, but when you have little ones, there's very little flexibility."

The most recent federal data on teacher attrition, from 2013-14, show that nationwide more than 38 percent of the teachers who left the profession and nearly 23 percent of those who switched schools voluntarily did so for "personal reasons"—a higher share than for any other reason, including salary and school climate.

The federal data show that nearly 1 in 10 of those who left the classroom did so to care for family, and research suggests even teachers still in the classroom often grapple with the conflict between nurturing and educating other people's children and doing the same for their own.

Additionally, a 2014 study by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, found child care and education for young children second only to a home mortgage in leading expenses for the average American family. More than 60 percent of those who left the classroom said their ability to balance work and life improved after they stopped teaching, the federal data show.

[← Back to Story](#)



Special Report: Getting & Keeping Good Teachers

Teacher Recruitment and Retention: It's Complicated

Can Child-Care Benefits Keep Teachers in the Classroom?

Need a STEM Teacher? This District Trains Its Own

Latino Male Teachers: Building the Pipeline

Why Special Educators Really Leave the Classroom

Special Educators: Why We Want to Quit and What Keeps Us Going

Does It Make Sense to Offer Housing Perks for Teachers?

From Teacher Villages to Tiny Homes: Housing Perks for Educators

Staffing Schools in No-Stoplight Towns

Map: Where Are the Nation's Most Remote School Districts?

View the Full Report



Kristin Delahanty brings her son Nathan, 7 months, and her daughter Norah, 4, to the Children's Learning World Montessori at Niles North High School, where her husband teaches. The teachers' union and the district partnered to start the day-care program there.

Work- and family-life balance is a growing concern for schools, according to teaching researcher Richard Ingersoll, because the teaching workforce has been both growing and becoming younger over the last 20 years.

"The most common teacher in the late '80s was a 15-year veteran; the most common teacher in 2012 was in her first year," said Ingersoll, an education and policy professor at Pennsylvania State University Graduate School of Education. "Lots of workplaces in other fields have been doing this kind of thing [providing child care], because you are trying to make it easier for young women to do that [work-life] balance."

When his daughter was born 25 years ago, Dave Severson became one of the first male teachers in his Missoula, Mont., district to take paternity leave. Today, he said, low unemployment in the area has led to

more family benefits in local schools, though they are still rare in contract negotiations. For example, Missoula provides six months' paid maternity leave. The district and union partnered to set up child care for teachers during professional development days.

Cost Concerns

High start-up costs still discourage many districts from having day-care centers on site. And Severson said in tight budgets, family-friendly benefits are often among the first to go—even as extended school days become the norm.

"You've got to balance your family life with your school life, and teaching is pretty rigorous in time and expectations," said Severson, now a field representative for Montana's state teachers' union.



High school English teacher Ashley Amelianovich says goodbye to her son Miles, who is almost 2 years old, at the day-care center housed at her high school in Skokie, Ill. District leaders see the child-care center as a teacher-retention tool.

The Niles Township district in Skokie, Ill., built a day-care center on its middle school campus in 2013 and has since expanded it to two sites serving about 80 children from birth to age 4, after more than a decade of requests from teachers and staff members. Ann Geothals, an English teacher at Niles North High School, said the teachers' union worked with the district to help pay to start the program, and has prioritized it in contracts.

"This is just one of the things that keeps women and parents of young children able to work here," Geothals said.

Niles North history and economics teacher Sarah Stucky is one of them. Stucky has enrolled her 3-year-old son Emmett in the program.

"My spouse travels quite a bit, and not having to do multiple drop-offs is tremendously helpful," Stucky said. "And as a parent, it provides a lot of peace of mind to have your kids in the building."

In an online survey of 150 district recruiters using Education Week's TopSchoolJobs site, more than a third said potential teachers had asked about the availability of child care during the hiring process.

(While the recruiters came from a variety of districts nationwide, the survey was not nationally representative.) Very few of the respondents' districts offer vouchers or other child-care subsidies, but a majority do have a district-run day-care program, and teachers participate in more than half of them.

'Just Good Business'

In 1999, the Carmel Clay, Ind., district was trying to keep up with a booming student population. "We were hiring a lot of young teachers, and therefore a lot of teachers who had just had or were having children," recalled Roger McMichaels, the district's associate superintendent for business affairs. "We wanted our teachers to come back to work [after parental leave], but ... some would stay home because they didn't find child care or couldn't afford it. Young teachers make half the salary of older teachers, so when you are a young teacher, that's a major issue."

McMichaels pushed the district to include an on-site day-care facility for employees in a new building under construction. The school board approved the initiative by one vote, recalled Karen Kosoglov, the director at Educare, Carmel Clay's child-care facility. Many school board members were skeptical that teachers would be interested in the service and were also wary of the high upfront costs to build and staff classes for infants and toddlers.

"Fast-forward, and we have more than 200 children," McMichaels said. They represent about 20 percent of the 16,000-student district's teachers and staff—not counting the staff members who took part in the program when their children were young.

Educare today serves children of teachers who range in age from infancy to 5 years old, and its own teachers get ongoing professional development from the district.

"We're a part of the school system," Kosoglov said.

McMichaels agreed. Educare stays open until 5 p.m., and he said a majority of teachers with children in the center use those few hours between the end of class and pick-up time to grade papers, work on lesson plans, or collaborate.

"They stay at work longer ... and when they do go home, they can actually go home and focus on their family and not try to grade papers," he said. "In effect, we are enabling the teacher to work and be less distracted, and that pays dividends in their professionalism and commitment."

Stucky, of the Niles Township district, agreed that having day care extend to 6 p.m. means she also doesn't have to bolt for her car when the school day ends at 3:30 p.m.

"As a result of having care in the building, I'm able to stay teaching full time, I'm able to participate in the faculty committees that meet after school," Stucky said.

Subsidies for private child care—either for early care or sick days—are rare in K-12 education, but more common in higher education and other professions.

In a 2009 study of Cornell University's child-care voucher program, Morrissey found that subsidies ranged from under \$100 to \$5,000 an employee, and the majority of the program users learned about it from a supervisor or colleague participating in it. A follow-up study in 2011 suggested nearly half of the employees who used the child-care subsidies reported having a better work-life balance after using it.

"Over the years, I've personally had more than one employee tell me, 'I've had opportunities to leave the school district, but I wouldn't leave because of the child-care program,'"

RELATED BLOG



[Visit this blog.](#)

1/26/2018

Can Child-Care Benefits Keep Teachers in the Classroom? - Education Week

McMichaels said. "Improving your employees' mindset actually saves you money. If you didn't do it for any other reason, it's just good business."

Vol. 37, Issue 18, Pages 6-8

Published in Print: January 24, 2018, as **Can Child-Care Perks Keep Teachers On the Job?**