

## **Child Care Needs Impact Employees' Work**

Smart Beginnings, a local public/private school readiness initiative, has released the results of a survey on child care options from 700 employees at more than a dozen local employers, which indicates that child care issues have a big impact on absenteeism and productivity in the workplace. The survey asked working parents about the costs and availability of child care and their perspective on balancing the care of young children and a job.

Peggy Echols, Vice President of Operations at State Farm Insurance, and a member of the Smart Beginnings initiative, was the first business to survey staff. "State Farm has always looked at the education of our children as a workforce issue," Echols said. "And, we know education starts with quality child care. When we surveyed our employees we confirmed that we need to do more to assure access to affordable quality care, not only to secure our future work force, but to provide peace of mind for the moms, dads, and grandparents that currently work for us."

The lack of child care options has an impact on employers, with 62% of employees noting that child care problems have an impact on their work schedules. Over half (52%) of those responding have missed work to handle a child care issue.

Cost was stated as the number one problem in finding child care. The respondents cited 1) cost, 2) lack of openings and 3) (tied) limited hours and low quality of care as their primary concerns. Only 14% reported encountering no problems in finding child care.

Fifty percent of respondents reported that finding child care was very or somewhat difficult. Nearly half (46%) of employees utilize child care centers, while 29% use a family member and 20% utilize home day care providers.

Tim Hulbert, President of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce, notes that this is an important business issue. "Child care and early childhood education are critical, central workforce issues, and to have the workforce that we need today and tomorrow demands that we address them now. The Smart Beginnings initiative gives this community a head start on meeting this challenge head on."

Many employees responded with addition comments, including:

*"The cost (of child care) is just too much and I can't afford it and because of that, I feel my child won't get the early education she deserves to get her ready for school!"*

*"Many jobs now require time outside the 9-5pm job; providers are hard to find."*

*"I was dismayed ...that there was not a greater focus on quality early childhood education. There are only a handful of nationally accredited centers."*

*“It's very difficult finding available, affordable child care. Our first child care option had very frequent turnover; our second child care option was very high quality but extremely expensive.”*

These survey findings on local child care needs and the impact on the workforce will be included in Smart Beginnings' upcoming report on the state of local school readiness, to be released later this spring.

For more information, visit [www.SmartBeginningsinfo.org](http://www.SmartBeginningsinfo.org) or contact Miriam Rushfinn, Smart Beginnings Director, at 434-972-1702 or [mrushfinn@UnitedWayTJA.org](mailto:mrushfinn@UnitedWayTJA.org)

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*Smart Beginnings is a local, public/private school readiness initiative working to help children arrive at school prepared to succeed. Partners include the Charlottesville/Albemarle Partnership for Children, local nonprofits, City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County Schools, early care educators and providers, City and County governments, the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce, Piedmont Virginia Community College, UVa Curry School of Education, UVa Health System and Martha Jefferson Hospital. Smart Beginnings is part of a statewide network of local partnerships working with the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation.*