



August 28, 2019

Let's Support Education at Our Child Care Centers

I was proud to support the passage of legislation this year to increase teacher's pay in Illinois. I recognize and applaud efforts that the current administration is making toward increasing teacher and parental support. The announcement of recent wage raises for Illinois teachers from \$32,076 to \$40,000 with an automatic annual salary increase aligned with the consumer price index is outstanding news! The passage of this bill into law sends a message that Illinois demands better for educators in our state. Continued bold steps like this are needed to revitalize enthusiasm in the field of education, an industry that I am passionate about. As a teacher by profession and having taught elementary school social studies in the Chicago Public Schools for 6 years – and I have kept up my teacher's license - I know the sacrifices and dedication of most teachers in Illinois.

But in addition, it is important to remember that early childhood education is the foundation that prepares students for teachers in our elementary schools and beyond. We cannot ignore the fact that our community-based organizations that pipeline their students into schools have an abysmal lack of resources available to operate. I urge the governor to take action immediately to increase the rate of pay for early childhood educators and leave no high-quality teacher behind.

For 100% of the licensed centers that were surveyed this summer by Child Care Advocates United, all listed "personnel" as the most significant portion of their operating costs, regardless of if they are not-for-profit or for-profit entities. Using licensed child care centers in Chicago as an example:

- Traditionally over 60% of the employees in the childcare industry are minimum wage earners. Consequently, the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) reimbursement rate was calculated to support a work force at this pay level.
- In July 2019, the minimum wage increased from \$12/hour to \$13/hour making to total increase in the minimum wage 57.6% from the baseline \$8.25/hour.
- In July 2019, no increase was given to centers accepting CCAP to help defer the cost of increased wages. Centers throughout Chicago are closing classrooms and sites because of the unaffordability of their largest line item: staffing.

Early child care providers are valued as foundation builders for future leaders. Research shows that children are more successful in school and beyond if they are given a strong foundation in the earliest years of their lives.

I urge this administration to recognize the need to move early child care teachers past the minimum wage threshold and align pay with the value of an extended day, layers of compliances, dismal retirement and benefit packages, and a continuously heavy workload.

So while I, along with other community-based organizations, am ecstatic about the rekindling of support for public school teachers, we all hope it inspires the question, “When do their early childhood education partners receive pay commensurate with the important work they contribute to the field of education?” To quote my colleague state Representative Katie Stuart, “I get frustrated being told all the time ‘teachers are important, teachers are important. They’re so important, I value my kids’ teachers,’” Stuart said. “But when it came down to making sure that those teachers in the room can afford to do that job, that’s where we frequently fell short.”

I am delighted that Illinois has a governor who supports education and proves it through policy. Because of our governor’s zeal for supporting education, I eagerly anticipate the same consideration to increase reimbursement rates for community based organizations in coming months to ensure that Illinois’ most vulnerable children maintain access to high-quality programs.

With this administration, Illinois finally has an opportunity to create a comprehensive and effective educational ecosystem, which is the best investment of our time and resources. I look forward to being an avid partner in the legislature to support this initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District