

# Madison College, United Way leaders discuss child care solutions

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Leaders of Madison College and United Way of Dane County say employers in Wisconsin have a role to play in addressing the state's child care challenges.

Speaking during a recent webinar hosted by the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Dane County Vice President of Community Impact Jody Bartnick discussed ways that businesses can help support local child care without needing to launch their own program.

"They can subsidize buildings, they can subsidize rent ... I've heard examples of subsidizing heat for child care programs," she said. "So there's lots of really creative ways that businesses can step in, and communities can step in, and help offset those costs. Because there's a tremendous amount of operational costs that goes into running child care programs."

Bartnick and Madison College President Jack Daniels III agreed the current system for providing child care in Wisconsin is broken, with industry workers being paid too little while child care services remain prohibitively expensive for many state residents.

State officials in October announced Wisconsin is getting \$15 million from the U.S. Department of Labor to help boost the early childhood education and child care workforce. In a release announcing this grant, the state Department of Workforce Development highlighted the "significant challenges Wisconsin residents face in securing accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare" as a major workforce concern.

Daniels said more public-private partnerships could help address these issues, noting the lack of affordable child care options is impacting businesses' ability to attract and retain workers.

"If you're going to talk about retention of employees — and in many aspects, attracting employees — do you have the accessibility to quality child care?" he said.

“And that’s huge for both employers as well as us as an educational institution.”

But despite the critical importance of child care for the economy, the pay for workers is among the lowest of any industry in the nation, Bartnick said.

“Lower than fast food restaurants, lower than the gas station industry — lower than industries that require less professional development and educational requirements,” she said.

Daniels noted this issue is keeping workers from considering child care and early childhood education as a valid career path.

He also said businesses and organizations that have vacant or “underutilized” real estate could leverage those resources to support the child care industry. But he added more resources will need to be allocated to ensure that extra space can be used effectively.

“I think that the idea really has a lot of legs and good viability,” he said.

Watch the full discussion here:

<https://agreatermadison.wistia.com/medias/ouc8dav4hi>

See an earlier story on this issue:

<https://www.wisbusiness.com/2022/la-crosse-survey-underlines-states-child-care-challenges/>

*-By Alex Moe*