Child care teachers are essential workers—let’s treat them that way

With COVID-19, the sacrifice is even greater and more dangerous

Early educators have always provided a critical service that allows other workers to do their jobs. But during this pandemic, they are being asked to serve children of other essential workers without the appropriate pay, health care, and personal protective equipment (PPE) or recognition that should come with risking their lives.

Teachers are critical to a child’s development
Don’t have benefits that support their well-being
Sacrifice their own income security for this valuable work

State and federal guidelines for child care during the pandemic aren’t realistic

Pandemic response has put early educators’ lives at risk

Most states have closed K–12 schools
Babies can’t cover their sneezes
Early educators are at risk, and many lack health insurance, paid sick leave, and adequate PPE
Yet most states encourage child care facilities to remain open

Early educators experience greater health ailments than the general population
Caring for children of at-risk frontline workers increases educators’ risk of getting the virus

With COVID-19, the sacrifice is even greater and more dangerous

They were asking us to do crazy things with our health and our lives, without real regard for the risk we were taking.
—Pat Sullivan, San Francisco family child care owner and advocate

Child care professionals are left to make impossible choices

If all the child care centers close, nobody’s going to be able to go to work.
—Tammy Dannoff, Wisconsin family child care owner

Our industry is going to crumble if we don’t use this as an opportunity to make things better.
—Kyra Swenson, Wisconsin preschool teacher

We need to transform chronic underfunding of child care into a secure system

Even in better times, the early care and education workforce requires rights, raises and respect

Health insurance and paid sick leave
Living wages
Safe work environments
Recognition for their vital work

Public investment is the way

We need to transform arbitrary underfunding of child care into a secure system

Recommendations for the essential early care and education sector

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—Kyra Swenson, Wisconsin preschool teacher

Together, we can take action to support our essential caregivers in our nation’s cradle to career system.