

Childcare Taskforce Steering Committee

Final Report - April 2024

Introduction

On April 6, 2022, Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente Jr. announced the creation of a Childcare Taskforce during the 2022 State of the County Address. County Executive Picente highlighted the inadequate supply of childcare as one of several major hurdles that families, employers, and many others experienced at greater levels since the COVID-19 Pandemic. The announcement of the Childcare Taskforce followed several steps that were already being taken by the county to make daycare more affordable and accessible, including raising the income limits for families enrolled in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), reducing the parent's share of subsidized daycare costs, and expanding CCAP assistance to those actively searching for a job.

The Childcare Taskforce convened on November 17, 2022. The kick-off meeting welcomed professionals from the public and private sector, as well as school administrators, childcare providers, business owners, state and local elected officials, and many others. The meeting highlighted some of the greatest challenges facing childcare providers today, such as understaffing, limited building capacity, and restrictive OCFS regulations, all of which impact the provider's ability to open additional slots and facilities to families in need. The experience of accessing childcare for parents commonly consisted of extensive waitlists, transportation barriers, high costs that offset the financial benefits of going to work, and daycare times that did not align with the parent's work schedule. As a result, parents are faced with the decision of leaving the workforce to care for their children or placing their child in the care of someone ill equipped to facilitate healthy childhood development.

The organizational structure of the Childcare Taskforce consisted of a steering committee and five subcommittees to include the outreach, educational engagement, business liaison, policy, and program development subcommittee. Each subcommittee met monthly on three separate occasions in March, April, and for a joint meeting in June. The meetings were used as a platform to have a more detailed discussion about the challenges facing childcare providers and to review and discuss various data sources related to childcare in Oneida County. Subcommittee members used this information to identify numerous opportunities where actions could be taken to potentially improve the availability, affordability, and capacity of childcare facilities. Consequently, the collection of subcommittees developed these opportunities into eight unique recommendations for the Childcare Taskforce Steering Committee to consider.

Subcommittees

The following lists the different subcommittee titles operating underneath the Oneida County Childcare Taskforce: program development subcommittee, outreach subcommittee, educational engagement subcommittee, community feedback subcommittee, policy subcommittee, and business liaison subcommittee. Represented organizations and agencies include the Oneida County Government, Quality Stars NY, Workforce Development Board, Resource for Independent Living, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Masonic Childcare, Upstate Cerebral Palsy, Mohawk Valley Community College, Thea Bowman House, First Source, Court Street Children's Center, Utica Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Office of General Services, Perch Place, and the Rome Area Chamber of Commerce.

Each subcommittee played a vital role in developing the recommendations mentioned within this report. The program development subcommittee is comprised of individuals who are skilled in human services programming related to childcare, addressing the immediate needs of low-income families, transportation, and other childcare-related topics. The outreach subcommittee, consisting of members from all backgrounds, identified and developed methods of bringing awareness to the community and local businesses regarding any existing childcare services and/or programs. The educational engagement subcommittee is comprised of educational institution board members, teachers, professors, and administrators, and engaged collaboratively with various subcommittees to build upon the impact of existing or new programs, outreach efforts, or other initiatives specifically as it relates to school-aged children or college-bound students.

The community feedback subcommittee is comprised of parents, guardians, and concerned members of the community capable of identifying firsthand issues related to obtaining childcare. The policy subcommittee is comprised of individuals in the profit and not-for-profit business community, members of the public, and those who have historically invested in developing childcare-friendly policies within the workplace. Lastly, the business liaison subcommittee is comprised of leaders in the business community, capable of communicating on behalf of small, medium, and large businesses to identify barriers to recruiting and retaining employees as it relates to childcare.

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Summary of Taskforce Recommendations

Improve Childcare Worker Employment, Training & Retention

1

1.1 Creation of CDA Educational Pipeline & Certificate Subsidization

1.2 Creation of Alternative Workforce Pipeline

Expand Childcare Capacity

2

2.1 Hiring of Childcare Community Navigators

2.2 Subsidization of Family Daycare Startup Costs

2.3 Exploration of Funding Opportunities for Childcare Facilities

Identify & Eliminate Barriers To Accessing Childcare

3

3.1 Creation of Childcare Subsidy Marketing Campaign

3.2 Creation of Childcare Management Simulator

3.3 Review of NYS OCFS Regulations

Task Force Recommendations

1.1 Creation of CDA Educational Pipeline & Certificate Subsidization

Oneida County will collaborate with Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC) and other local educational institutions to develop a low/no-cost fast-track educational pipeline for those pursuing a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate or Birth-Grade 2 (B-2) certification. Furthermore, Oneida County will seek to subsidize the costs of obtaining CDA certification for childcare providers not actively enrolled in a college program.

1.2 Creation of Alternative Workforce Pipeline

Joint efforts will be made by Oneida County, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and local community organizations to identify untapped sources of childcare employment. Employment marketing strategies, hiring incentives, and other unique benefits for workers in the childcare industry will be reviewed as part of a broader strategy to increase the number of childcare workers county-wide.

2.1 Hiring of Childcare Community Navigators

Oneida County, in collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension, will make funding available to hire community navigators. Community navigators will be tasked with directly engaging the community to bring awareness about CCAP, opportunities to start an at-home registered family daycare, avenues for obtaining childcare, and opportunities for employment in childcare.

2.2 Subsidization of Family Daycare Startup Costs

Oneida County will make funding available to purchase childcare safety equipment that is required for county residents to establish a registered at-home family daycare facility. Additional funding will also be made available for existing childcare providers that require equipment to expand the capacity of services already being provided.

2.3 Exploration of Funding Opportunities for Childcare Facilities

Oneida County will identify funding opportunities for community partners and childcare providers on a rolling basis to financially support existing childcare programs. Where appropriate, Oneida County may also serve as a principal applicant for eligible childcare infrastructure and community development grants or provide technical assistance in cases where it is not the principal applicant.

3.1 Creation of Childcare Subsidy Marketing Campaign

Oneida County will develop and deploy a marketing campaign for the (CCAP) subsidy with the intent to reduce the negative stigmatization associated with the program and increase enrollment rates among low-moderate income families.

3.2 Creation of Childcare Management Simulator

Oneida County will develop a "Childcare Management Simulator" event that will be created in collaboration with various community organizations to bring awareness about the multitude of regulatory challenges that childcare providers are facing, and the impact that this is having on the community. Invitations to participate will be sent to local and state elected officials, business leaders, and other organizations that are impacted by the childcare deficit in Oneida County.

3.3 Review of NYS OCFS Regulations

Oneida County will engage in dialogue with NYS OCFS officials to discuss childcare regulations that restrict childcare providers' ability to expand capacity for families and/or improve employee pay.

Recommendation	Action Items	Estimated Cost
1.1 Creation of CDA Educational Pipeline & Certificate Subsidization	<p>MVCC will review its existing early childhood education fast track programming to focus on students interested in working in a childcare setting</p> <p>MVCC will investigate how its course listing could be adjusted to fulfill any/all CDA certification requirements</p> <p>Oneida County will conduct a cost/demand review associated with subsidizing CDA certification for local childcare providers</p> <p>Oneida County will subsidize the cost of obtaining a CDA certification for local providers</p>	\$2,500/CDA Certification
1.2 Creation of Alternative Workforce Pipeline	<p>Oneida County will develop targeted advertisements to graduating students, technical career students, and new or expecting parents to highlight the unique benefits of working in childcare</p> <p>Oneida County will work with BOCES to develop a childcare technical program capable of offering CDA certification to qualified students</p>	<\$50,000
2.1 Hiring of Childcare Community Navigators	<p>Oneida County will fund one or more community navigator positions in collaboration with community partners</p> <p>Oneida County will provide childcare resources to perinatal medical providers to assist with counseling new and expecting parents</p>	\$42,500-\$127,500 (Dependent on number of navigators hired)
2.2 Subsidization of Family Daycare Startup Costs	<p>Oneida County will create a fund dedicated to registered family daycare startup costs</p> <p>Oneida County will allocate some funds for startup costs to existing childcare providers seeking to expand capacity</p> <p>Oneida County will establish an online procurement portal from which approved items could be purchased directly</p>	\$138,000- \$207,000
2.3 Exploration of Funding Opportunities for Childcare Facilities	<p>Oneida County will research public infrastructure grant opportunities and communicate such opportunities to childcare providers</p> <p>Oneida County will provide data collection and analysis assistance to support childcare providers applying for grant opportunities</p> <p>If appropriate, Oneida County may serve as the principal applicant for eligible childcare infrastructure grant programs</p>	Varies by project
3.1 Creation of Childcare Subsidy Marketing Campaign	<p>Oneida County will invest funds to rebrand the local CCAP program using various mediums of communications</p> <p>Oneida County will make any forms, applications, or resources related to the CCAP subsidy readily available on the Oneida County website</p> <p>Oneida County will engage with childcare providers to better understand their hesitation regarding the acceptance of parents participating in CCAP</p> <p>Oneida County will work with OCFS and local providers to identify strategies for reducing CCAP-related administrative burdens</p>	\$0-\$25,000 (Dependent on funding source)
3.2 Childcare Management Simulator	<p>Oneida County will create a planning committee to plan and execute a childcare program management simulator</p> <p>The planning committee will develop a list of program outcomes, activities, and other team-based exercises</p> <p>The planning committee will identify a suitable location to host the event</p> <p>The planning committee will invite local and state elected officials, business leaders, and prominent community members to attend the event</p>	<\$10,000
3.3 Review of NYS OCFS Regulations	<p>Oneida County will convene a work group consisting of impacted organizations and partners to develop a comprehensive list of burdensome OCFS regulations that pertain to the childcare industry</p> <p>Oneida County will collaborate with OCFS officials to develop waivers, exceptions, and reconsiderations to existing childcare regulations</p>	No Cost

1.1 Creation of CDA Educational Pipeline & Certificate Subsidization

Existing NYS OCFS regulations require that childcare facilities maintain a conservative ratio of children to staff to ensure that the children are being properly supervised. Among the student to staff ratio requirements is the added condition that the children are also supervised by someone who holds the position of head teacher. A staff member can be hired for the position of head teacher if they either received an associate degree from an accredited institution or received their CDA certification within the last three years.

Childcare providers have reported that a shortage of staff who can serve in the position of head teacher has severely limited the number of children that can be provided childcare services. Childcare providers stated that some existing staff that currently serve as teaching assistants (TA) have not expressed an interest in receiving a two-year degree to become a head teacher, and that becoming CDA certified can be costly to the facility (\$2,500 per certification) and a significant time burden for employees. In addition to becoming certified, employees must recertify every three years or risk being terminated from their position or demoted to a TA. Data collected by the Oneida County Department of Planning also found that there may be little financial incentive to become a head teacher. In a local childcare wage assessment survey that was distributed to childcare providers in Oneida County, it was found that head teachers on average made just less than \$1.00 more per hour than as a TA.

MVCC and Herkimer College offer several course listings that are intended for individuals seeking to enter the childcare and early childhood education fields. Upon graduation from these programs, students will choose to work with children, however, many choose to work with local school systems as opposed to with childcare providers. Childcare providers cite better benefit packages and other unique benefits such as having summer off as major reasons why new graduates make this decision. Throughout various CCTF subcommittee meetings, MVCC has indicated that it would be willing to review its existing early childhood education fast-track programming to see how it can be more focused for individuals seeking to work in a childcare facility setting. MVCC also indicated that, while there has been limited interest from students seeking to be CDA certified, it would investigate how its course listing could be adjusted to fulfill any/all CDA certification requirements.

Oneida County should work with MVCC to identify educational opportunities where students can pursue courses that more directly align with a career in childcare. These efforts should aim to develop a pipeline where students can feel confident in finding near-immediate employment after graduation, and childcare providers can expect and have access to a steady flow of skilled workers. This educational opportunity should be of value to both students who have the intention of going on to complete a two or four-year degree, and those who do not and seek to receive a CDA certification from their efforts.

In tandem with MVCC developing an educational pipeline program for prospective childcare providers, Oneida County should review the demand and costs associated with subsidizing CDA certification for local childcare providers. If a provider opts to benefit from Oneida County subsidizing their CDA certification costs, Oneida County should encourage providers to use the saved costs as financial incentives for employees interested in pursuing head teacher positions and/or seeking to advance their education in the field of childcare. The financial incentive for employees could take several forms including a higher pay rate, a one-time bonus, or another form of benefit. The impact of this policy would result in a more skilled workforce, improve the overall competitiveness of childcare employers, and increase the capacity of childcare in Oneida County.

1.2 Creation of an Alternative Workforce Pipeline

Childcare providers throughout Oneida County have identified a constrained workforce as a major barrier to increasing childcare capacity at their facility. Childcare facilities often struggle to not only hire but also retain employees for long-term employment and cite increased hiring competition from school district employers, and challenges to their ability to offer competitive wages. Childcare providers frequently report that they are limited in their ability to offer a competitive wage because bringing in more revenue to increase salaries by increasing childcare service rates often results in a larger share of parents choosing to rely on non-licensed babysitters as a less safe childcare alternative. The financial impact of losing even a small percentage of clientele is compounded by the fact that childcare providers utilize a business model that is dependent on maintaining 100% capacity. Childcare providers look for grants and other financial incentives to offer their employees, but report that this isn't sufficient for hiring and retaining large swaths of the workforce.

Special education childcare programs face similar challenges, but these challenges are intensified by a lack of potential employees with sufficient qualifications necessary for employment. In New York, many special education providers require a B-2 certification to provide services to children with special needs who have not yet entered into a school system. Special education childcare providers need some level of college education to receive a B-2 certification, which includes but may not be limited to a bachelor's degree.

Childcare providers in most cases offer some unique benefits to attract more applicants, such as reduced childcare rates for employees with children. Providers explain that this benefit is often attractive to parents because they have a means of receiving income and reducing childcare costs, while also having the added benefit of being able to be with their child for most of the day. Employment with childcare providers also means that parents can have waitlists that extend sometimes for a year or more, due to the ongoing lack of capacity and staffing shortages, waived. Aside from parents, childcare providers note that youth graduating from high school, and who aren't interested in attending college immediately afterwards, can look towards the childcare field as a potential career pathway.

Oneida County should invest in various methods of advertising childcare employment opportunities to recent or expecting parents and recent high school graduates to help bolster the number of childcare workers in Oneida County. To attract recent or expecting parents, Oneida County should target local perinatal and pediatric healthcare provider locations to advertise childcare employment opportunities digitally or physically. Parents utilizing these medical services are likely to benefit from waived waitlist times, reduced childcare costs offered by childcare providers, and may be interested in having greater exposure to their child throughout the day.

To better establish a childcare employment pipeline for non-college bound youth seeking to enter the workforce after high school, Oneida County should work with BOCES to develop a childcare technical program capable of offering CDA certification to qualified students. This program would not only encourage youth to enter the childcare field but would also provide them the certifications necessary to seek advancement in the field and improve their financial well-being immediately after graduating. This program can also be utilized as a stepping stone for college-bound students who seek additional certifications, such as a B-2 certification that would qualify them to provide services to children with special needs and give additional qualifications to students interested in childhood education careers.

2.1 Hiring of Childcare Community Navigators

Some parents in Oneida County may not have, or be aware of, the childcare-specific resources that are readily available to them. These resources include information about accessing the CCAP subsidy, planning for childcare for expecting parents, navigating childcare facility waitlists, and the process of starting one's own registered family daycare. Without access to these resources or awareness of these programs, many parents are left to fend for themselves to find adequate and safe childcare, a process that can sometimes take several months to years while keeping the parent out of the workforce.

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Oneida County plays a crucial role in housing many of these resources, and providing educational and technical assistance to parents, childcare providers, and individuals interested in starting their own family daycare. CCE also oversees the Child Care Council, a workgroup that is dedicated to expanding access to childcare, assisting parents in finding the childcare that they need, and conducting research to better understand where additional community engagement and financial supports for childcare may be necessary. CCE staffs multiple outreach events every year to help bring awareness about the challenges associated with accessing childcare and to provide resources to both rural and urban communities throughout Oneida County.

CCTF subcommittee members recognized the importance of meeting families where they are at to provide these critical resources and to guarantee that everyone in the community has equitable access to the many childcare programs that are available county-wide. Many low-moderate income families especially may have to work long shifts or overnight shifts that restrict them from finding the time to access the locations where these resources are available. These accessibility challenges are compounded by families who might have limited transportation options, who are lacking a social community, or who might have inadequate access to medical care or information. These barriers to access may reduce the impact that CCE and other organizations hope to achieve through their outreach activities.

Oneida County should work collaboratively with its existing community organizations to fund one or more community navigator positions. Community navigators will be tasked with meeting families where they are at, such as at their homes, at doctors' offices, perinatal centers, and in places where community gatherings take place. Additionally, community navigators can further CCE's efforts to encourage more families to open registered family daycares in their homes, increasing the overall capacity of childcare throughout the county.

Special efforts should be made by Oneida County and its partners to conduct targeted outreach to medical providers including obstetricians, pediatricians, and other providers who regularly counsel new and expecting parents. Childcare providers continuously find that many parents are unaware of the fact that arrangements for childcare, more often than not, need to be planned prior to the child's birth to guarantee access to a quality facility. Additionally, expecting parents may be unaware of existing government programs that are designed to financially assist new parents. Through the utilization of community navigators to bridge the resource and educational gap between county-supported community providers and medical providers, medical providers will be better prepared to counsel families about the financial and time-restricted difficulties they may face once their child is born.

2.2 Subsidization of Family Daycare Startup Costs

Cornell Cooperative Extension currently provides technical support to individuals interested in opening a family daycare within their own home. This support includes providing access to state-required orientations and trainings, assistance with completing the NYS Child Care application packet, and assistance with maintaining compliance with all OCFS regulations. Following the completion of this licensing process, individuals are permitted to begin operating their own family daycare facility.

One of the major barriers identified with starting a family daycare is the costs associated with startup, which currently is the financial responsibility of the daycare provider. The startup costs can include diapers, playpens, various toys or educational materials, sleeping mats or cribs, and a variety of other equipment designed to improve the safety and quality of the environment for the children being supervised. CCE notes that this cost can be prohibitive to lower-income families interested in starting up their own family daycare and will prevent some individuals and legally exempt providers from becoming NYS certified providers. Providers from existing daycare centers echo the significant costs associated with starting a daycare, or in the case of existing providers, the cost for their equipment when expanding their existing capacity to be able to provide services to more parents.

It is recommended that Oneida County create a fund dedicated to backing the startup costs for individuals interested in starting a registered family daycare. It is also recommended that a portion of this fund be allocated to existing daycares with an approved plan for expansion that will result in an increase of their childcare capacity. The fund should be utilized to cover costs for items that will directly improve the safety and well-being of the children being supervised. Such items include playpens, safety gates, safe cribs and sleeping mats, emergency equipment such as choking rescue devices, and other necessary items.

CCTF subcommittee members recommended that Oneida County establish an online procurement portal from which approved items could be purchased directly. Oneida County would work collaboratively with CCE and local childcare experts to identify what items would be listed on the purchasing portal to ensure that they are safe, high quality, and well regarded nationally. The establishment of a purchasing portal would provide the added benefit of ensuring that upfront costs are directly billed to Oneida County, as opposed to the purchaser who may not otherwise have the funds required to participate in a reimbursement-based program.

2.3 Exploration of Funding Opportunities for Childcare Facilities

Childcare providers have expressed interest in expanding their facilities to increase the number of children they provide services to. However, providers recognize that expanding childcare facilities is a long-term goal that requires significant planning and funding to execute. The amount of planning that is required is amplified by the fact that the facilities must adhere to stringent OCFS regulations and subsequent licensing and permitting requirements to be operational. Furthermore, providers understand that any discussions regarding facility expansion must be forestalled until a sufficient childcare workforce is available in the community, and which includes a need for teaching assistants, head teachers, and directors to staff new facilities.

Oneida County should first address other recommendations made in this report that relate to childcare staff recruitment and retention prior to focusing its efforts on the expansion of childcare facilities. However, it is recommended that Oneida County begin to build a foundation for which it can provide either external funding or technical assistance to local childcare providers in preparation for future childcare facility development. Technical assistance provided by the county can include researching public infrastructure grant opportunities, communicating to providers when opportunities become available, and providing data collection and analysis assistance to support childcare providers applying for grant opportunities.

In addition to researching new infrastructure and childcare program funding opportunities, Oneida County can continue to monitor the following existing programs:

- *New York State Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)*
- *Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Catalyst Program*
- *New York State Child Care Stabilization Grant*
- *U.S. Small Business Administration Child Infrastructure Grant*
- *New York State Consolidated Funding Opportunities*

Utilizing these funding opportunities and others that become available will increase the availability of childcare slots county-wide and reduce the financial constraints for small businesses and Oneida County alike.

3.1 Creation of Childcare Subsidy Marketing Campaign

Subsidies are available for low-moderate income families who require childcare but may not have the financial resources to access it. Currently in Oneida County, families making under the threshold of 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for this subsidy, which is adjusted for family size. While all families making under this income level are eligible for the subsidy, not all childcare providers accept the subsidy due to the administrative burden associated with participating in CCAP.

Community partners have indicated that there is stigmatization surrounding the use of CCAP subsidy funds for parents, which may deter them from using the financial resource that is readily available for them. The Oneida County Childcare Unit reported that parents who have used the subsidy or inquired about the subsidy periodically do not complete the administrative process necessary to receive the funding. It was cited that these parents may resort to utilizing unregistered daycares or put their child in an environment that is either unsafe or not beneficial to their social or educational development.

Several counties throughout Central New York have begun rebranding and marketing the CCAP subsidy to reduce stigmatization and improve the public's awareness about the subsidy. The marketing of the subsidy is being done utilizing various online platforms, social media, and through the radio. The marketing of the CCAP subsidy is coupled with attempts to get more childcare providers to begin accepting the subsidy at their facilities.

Oneida County should learn from these marketing campaigns and engage in a rebranding of the local CCAP program. Subcommittee members indicated that a rebranding of the CCAP program would benefit from highlighting the program as a "scholarship" as opposed to a subsidy, since scholarships are typically viewed as a prudent financial decision. CCAP program funding that is provided by New York State is eligible to be used toward these marketing efforts and should be used if an excess of funds is available.

As an added measure to increase CCAP participation, Oneida County should review the process that parents must go through to access the subsidy. Specifically, efforts should be made to ensure that any forms, applications, or resources that parents may require to apply for the CCAP subsidy are readily available on the Oneida County website without the need to contact a representative from the Child Care Unit. Any additional processes beyond applying for funding that are capable of being streamlined while adhering to NYS OCFS regulations should also be considered for review.

In anticipation of an influx of families seeking to utilize the CCAP subsidy, Oneida County should engage with childcare providers who do not currently accept the CCAP subsidy as a form of payment to better understand what is contributing to their hesitation. Information learned from this engagement should be used towards reducing any notable administrative burdens while continuing to adhere to OCFS regulations. This information can also be utilized to better understand what, if any, incentives can be given to childcare providers who are willing to accept families that rely on the CCAP subsidy.

3.2 Creation of Childcare Management Simulator

Childcare providers in Oneida County have identified numerous challenges to their businesses that they face daily. These challenges include understaffing, competition from both the public and private sectors, and having to maintain a viable business model while adhering to OCFS regulations. Due to the complex nature of being a childcare provider, local and state elected officials, business leaders, and many others in the community may not have a thorough understanding of the struggles that providers face every day. A clearer comprehension of these challenges is necessary for local and state leaders to understand how they might be able to offer better support to childcare providers.

In past years, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA) has attempted to dissect the challenges and complexities associated with living in poverty. To do this, MVCAA began hosting a Poverty Symposium, or a “poverty simulator” in which business leaders, elected officials, and prominent members of the community attended to simulate common obstacles associated with poverty in small collaborative groups. In addition to providing participants with a significant change in perspective, the event also casted a light on some of the frustrations that individuals living in poverty experience as they navigate complex and frustrating public assistance programs. As a result, many stakeholders and community leaders left the event with a renewed interest in improving how the government interacts with those in poverty, while business leaders may have left feeling more compelled to support those struggling in poverty every day.

It is recommended that Oneida County work collaboratively with its community partners and childcare providers to establish a Childcare Management Simulator to bring awareness of the challenges and constraints that childcare providers face daily. Similar to MVCAA’s Poverty Symposium, this simulator would aim to bring local and state elected officials, business leaders, and other community members together to work in a collaborative setting. However, the aim would be to understand the various challenges and constraints that childcare providers face every day, and the growing sense of frustration that is being communicated. For example, participants would need to manage staff, funds, and other resources strategically to adhere to ever-compounding OCFS regulations, while also navigating challenges such as being understaffed or having unqualified staff and facing time constraints because of various administrative requirements put onto childcare providers.

The simulator itself serves as a relatively low-cost tool for sparking a constructive conversation between elected officials and leaders in the community. The intended outcome of the simulation would be to encourage state and local representatives to review the constraints placed on childcare providers, and collaboratively come up with ways to address some of the challenges that participants experienced. It would also be an opportunity for business leaders to learn how to take a more proactive approach in supporting childcare providers, and by extension, their employees who rely on providers to stay in the workforce. Finally, this simulator can serve as a platform to launch any other recommendation mentioned throughout this report, especially those that require significant community buy-in.

3.3 Review of NYS OCFS Regulations

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services regulates the provision of childcare services for all licensed and certified providers. The regulations established by OCFS cover anything from childcare facility design to staffing qualifications, to procedures on how to safely transport children to and from different rooms. The regulations are designed to ensure that the children being provided services are in a safe and secure environment and are inclusive of all children in a certified daycare facility not associated with a school district, which is, by contrast, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education.

Childcare providers in Oneida County have explained that while OCFS regulations are well-intentioned and designed to keep children safe, some regulations are a significant burden on childcare providers' abilities to provide an affordable and sustainable service. Specifically, childcare providers have highlighted that in many cases, OCFS regulations have exacerbated the shortage of childcare workers and have raised operating costs, which are ultimately then passed on to parents in need of childcare. Childcare providers not only raised concerns regarding the adverse impact of these regulations but also took issue with the fact that school districts supervising the same age group under the same conditions face significantly fewer regulations by comparison. CCTF subcommittee participants identified the following regulations and rules as having an adverse impact on childcare providers:

1 Supervision of Children (418-1.13 (f))

- *Standards of supervision among similar age groups are significantly more restrictive in OCFS facilities than Department of Education (DOE) facilities*
- *DOE facilities are permitted to host more children in a given space compared to OCFS-regulated facilities*
- *OCFS-regulated facilities with over 45 children require a director on staff*

2 Staff Eligibility Requirements (418-1.13(g)(5)(ii))

- *Prior childcare experience does not translate to added qualifications for the purpose of hiring staff and rewarding staff with promotions*
- *CDA certifications need to be renewed every three years, regardless of experience, adding undue costs and labor time to childcare providers and their staff*
- *OCFS requires a separate background check on staff for each location that they work at, often resulting in floating staff such as therapists requiring 3+ background checks for one job*

3 Other Regulations/Concerns

- *Lack of existing protections for childcare staff working with children who have a history of violent acts (Ex. biting, scratching, etc.)*
- *Various OCFS online mandated trainings unavailable in languages other than English*

Oneida County will convene a work group consisting of impacted organizations to develop a comprehensive list of additional regulatory burdens. Subsequently, Oneida County will engage with OCFS officials to address these regulatory challenges that childcare providers are facing. The County will seek to reduce these barriers by encouraging OCFS to utilize waivers, exceptions, and to reconsider existing regulations that prevent childcare providers from creating additional capacity, while also ensuring that safeguards for children remain in place.

Conclusion

The recommendations offered throughout this report address the three greatest challenges faced by childcare providers in Oneida County: a lack of access to qualified staff, a lack of certified and state-approved facilities, and a lack of awareness about existing childcare resources. Chief among these challenges is the need to increase the overall size of the childcare workforce by utilizing a collaborative approach with educational institutions throughout the County to develop a job pipeline for students interested in the childcare field. The growing workforce should be positioned financially to be well-trained and properly certified, contributing to a safe and secure environment for the children that they supervise, and opening doors for professional advancement in the field.

As the workforce grows through these initiatives, capitalization on this growth by supporting the expansion of childcare facilities and the creation of new certified family daycares is critical. This can be achieved by providing the necessary resources and supplies to new family daycares and existing providers to create a solid foundation from which these small businesses can succeed. Looking towards the future, Oneida County will continue to provide support for larger and more ambitious projects that will significantly increase the County's overall childcare capacity and have a profound impact on families and businesses alike.

Oneida County is devoted to the belief that these opportunities for growth and development should be accessible to all its residents and that the barriers to accessing these resources are reduced in the process. To improve accessibility, recommendations were made to meet parents and prospective providers right in their communities to guide them through the complicated process of finding childcare or creating their own source of childcare. For those who choose to start their own family daycare, and for those who have been in the childcare industry for years, Oneida County is committed to advocating on behalf of those businesses against burdensome regulatory policies that inhibit growth and success.

Close partnerships with various public, private, and non-profit organizations offering expertise in the field of childcare ensured that these recommendations reflect a comprehensive approach to resolving a complex issue that is present in Oneida County and throughout the United States. The execution of these recommendations will require a similarly collaborative approach and one that calls upon a diversity of thought and experience from the community.