

Update on the State of Child Care in Boston

A summary of a presentation given to The Chinatown Coalition

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Decision makers at state and local level now understand the importance of quality early education care and out of school programs and are committed to improving both the supply and quality. There are numerous efforts in Massachusetts to do so (higher standards, the development of a quality rating system, Universal Preschool Expansion dollars, Early Childhood Scholarships, a Quality Rating System). Nevertheless, with the economy in shambles certain policies the state is pursuing impact Chinatown and Chinese families negatively.

Data gathered by EQUIP, a program that analyses supply and demand of child care in Boston's neighborhoods shows that the South End, Chinatown, Fenway area has a good supply of preschool age slots in numerous programs throughout the community. As is the case elsewhere care for infants and toddlers is scant and some of it is lacking in quality.

The quality of care in centers in our community as evidenced by licensed programs, teachers with degrees and centers with National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation is good. Requirements for centers receiving subsidies for families increase yearly and teachers in subsidized programs are working to meet higher educational credentials. This raises salaries and in turn the cost of care for parents

The issue for Chinese families of low income remains access and affordability. Private fee rates at BCNC currently are \$195 a week for preschoolers and \$290 a week for toddlers. This is not the real cost. BCNC raises money to keep care affordable.

Two kinds of subsidies are available for families who meet work and income requirements. One is contracted care subsidies which are given to a program (like BCNC) and obtained by parents through that program. Income eligible parents put their child's name on a state list via computer (all in English) and then are selected on a first come first serve basis when a center has a slot. BCNC has Chinese speaking staff to help parents place their name on the waiting list. Currently this care is available to parents who are working and low income and parents coming off of welfare. Forty percent of the subsidies for child care is contracted care.

The other subsidies are vouchers which are obtained through Child Care Choices of Boston and can be used in a number of programs the state has determined are qualified. Child Care Choices keeps a list of potential voucher parents and determines if they are eligible. Parents then receive a voucher which they can use in approved programs to reduce their tuition costs. They must establish their eligibility periodically with Child Care Choices.

Since there are no Chinese speakers employed at present an English speaker should accompany parents if necessary. Traditionally both income eligible working parents and parents coming off of welfare have been able to receive vouchers. Recently, the state decided that only parents coming off of welfare could access this care. All other families are on a waiting list until future notice. Sixty percent of the dollars for subsidies are through vouchers.

The issue for Chinatown is that because of language, culture and recent immigration status Chinese families do not often use welfare. Therefore, they cannot access 60% of the care. This means that many of our families will do without licensed quality care and be forced to use relatives, unlicensed care (which is unmonitored) or send children back to China. Currently, they only have access through contracts. This too could change in the future should the state decide to further limit access to what they determine is the neediest families. It is important that we let people know that although our families do not utilize welfare often they are among the neediest in the commonwealth and should not be discriminated against. The harm is to the children, families and to providers in centers and family child care who serve these families.