

**Response to SB 282**

Dear Committee Members,

I stand before you today as a former child care provider and a consumer of child care for 4 children, including one with disabilities. Lastly, I represent Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities or KCCTO as a member of their executive board.

Please consider our grave concern with the contents of SB 282. We believe that the changes proposed within SB 282 are detrimental to the health, safety, and quality of care provided to Kansas children. It is no secret that child care is in crisis and children, families, and child care providers are all suffering. However, deregulation is not an acceptable solution.

Please invest a few minutes of your time in reviewing this 2-page resource from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of our country’s leading early childhood advocacy and professional organizations. *Deregulation Won’t Solve Child Care...But It Will Decrease Safety and Supply* describes how solutions require significant investments rather than deregulation, because:

- There is no correlation between regulations and child care supply.
- Ratios and group sizes are necessary for safety and quality – and prevent educator burnout and turnover. (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2022)

Instead of addressing public investments that will help alleviate the problems facing child care in our state, SB 282 proposes changes to staff qualifications, staff education, ratios and group size that will negatively impact the safety and quality of Kansas children and child care programs.

The proposed lowered qualification and education requirements are particularly concerning. Child care is a profession, and one of great importance because child care professionals are responsible for children’s lives. These professionals should be held to high standards in training and education so that they are continuously expanding their knowledge and understanding of best practices with young children. Lowering staff qualifications and limiting annual professional development to a maximum of 8 hours per year impacts professional growth and programmatic quality. Allowing 14-year-old children to be counted in ratio as staff members is irresponsible, especially when combined with the proposed limitation of professional education.

Increasing the total number of children allowed in care as well as increasing the infant and toddler to caregiver ratio will not solve the child care access issue. Instead, it will decrease the safety and quality of child care programs. We know infants and young children thrive in warm and responsive caregiving environments. Even the best caregivers will struggle to provide responsive interactions and care if ratios are increased.

For the wellbeing of current Kansas children and the immediate and long-term impact on our state, we ask that you please not support these proposed changes. Additional resources you may find impactful are provided on the back of this letter.

Sources:

National Association for the Education of Young Children (2022). Deregulation won’t solve childcare...but it will decrease safety and supply. [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/2022\\_policy\\_deregulationresourcepolicymakers\\_final\\_1\\_1.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/2022_policy_deregulationresourcepolicymakers_final_1_1.pdf)

### **The Network of infant/toddler Researchers**

“Quality in infant and toddler settings includes various features such as low child to staff ratios, small group size, and specialized teacher education and training.”

“Research suggests high-quality care and learning programs that begin early in life have the potential to improve developmental outcomes as well as close gaps in educational achievement for young children (Mayoral, 2013; NICHD, 2005; Yazejian, Bryant, Freel, Burchinal, & the Educare Learning Network Investigative Team, 2015).”

[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/nitr\\_inquire\\_may\\_2016\\_070616\\_b508c\\_ompliant.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/nitr_inquire_may_2016_070616_b508c_ompliant.pdf)

### **CLASP: Policy Solutions that Work for Low-Income People**

“Infants and toddlers need healthy and safe environments in which to explore and learn. Small group sizes with low child-to-provider ratios are linked to better-quality child care environments and more positive caregiving interactions between providers and children.”

*“We create chaos and confusion when we put too many infants or toddlers in one group, even with an appropriate number of adult caregivers.— J. Ronald Lally, Yolanda Ledon Torres, and Pamela C. Phelps, “Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups.”*

<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/BetterforBabies2.pdf>

Submitted by Vera Stroup-Rentier, March 8, 2023

# Deregulation Won't Solve Child Care . . . But It Will Decrease Safety and Supply

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Increasing child care access, quality, and affordability must be a national, state, and local priority. Decades of research, data, and experience make clear, however, that the solution to growing the supply of quality child care supply is not through deregulation that lowers health, safety, staffing, and qualification requirements. The solution, rather, is through significant investments—in the education and compensation of the early childhood workforce, facilities, and family supports.

## No Correlation Between Regulations and Child Care Supply

Regulations are often scapegoated for the high price and limited availability of licensed child care. However, previous [analysis](#) has found no correlation between the strictness of state regulations and state levels of child care supply, indicating that more stringent regulation is unlikely to have a large impact on child care supply.

Prior to the pandemic, [researchers examined how state regulations correlate with supply shortages](#) by scoring the following regulations in each state:

- › Teacher-to-child ratios
- › Group sizes
- › Minimum number of children at which point licensing is mandatory
- › Teacher and director qualification requirements

The stricter a regulation, the higher its score. When overlaid with data on child care supply, however, the analysis found no correlation between the state regulations examined and child care supply. Further, none of the individual factors that contributed to the overall regulation score were shown to have a statistically significant impact on the supply of child care slots. While a wide array of factors affect child care supply, these results indicate that more stringent regulations aren't driving the problem.

## Ratios and Group Sizes are Necessary for Safety and Quality—and Prevent Educator Burnout and Turnover

Regulations provide [important safety protections](#) for children and uphold the [quality](#) of early education and care. Regulations such as staff to child ratios and maximum group sizes ensure adequate supervision and interaction with children to keep them safe and engaged in learning, while requirements regarding qualifications and professional development recognize and uplift the depth of knowledge, skills, and competencies it takes to deliver on the complex science of early learning in the early years.

Recommended [developmentally appropriate maximum group sizes and staff to child ratios](#) in center- or school-based settings:

Age	Ratio	Max. Class Size
Infant (Birth-15 months)	1:4	8
Toddler/Two (12-36 months)	1:6	12
Preschool (30 months-5 years)	1:10	20

Maintaining low ratios and group sizes are also key to early childhood educator success and well-being. During the early stages of the pandemic, when classrooms were capped at much smaller group sizes to promote health and safety, [anecdotal evidence](#) suggests educators saw positive changes regarding interactions with children and were feeling less burnt out at the end of the day.

*Lower ratios and smaller group sizes are necessary to keep children safe – but they also keep educators in their programs by limiting staff burnout, turnover, and staffing shortages. Efforts to loosen regulations, driven by a goal of increasing supply and program revenue, will actually have the opposite effect by driving educator burnout and turnover even higher.*

*“Having worked in settings with different ratios, I can assure you that the lower the ratio, the better the quality of care. To increase ratios would not only be detrimental to the developing child, it would increase burnout rates for a workforce that already carries a heavy load for minimal pay and benefits.” – Jenn Boisvert, Early Childhood Educator from Westbrook, Maine*

## Solutions Require Public Investment

While there are opportunities to streamline and lessen paperwork burdens, and target the revision of regulations that undermine the expertise and autonomy of early childhood educators, policies that make child care less

attractive to educators by making their jobs harder (via increased ratios and group sizes) will worsen the supply problem those policies are trying to solve.

The foundational problem underlying the child care crisis is the lack of adequate public funding; without substantial and sustainable investments, our nation will continue to struggle to address the scale and urgency of the challenges of [high child care prices](#), [child care deserts](#), and [low compensation](#). Quality child care is resource-intensive, but unlike in the K-12 education system or the ECE system in many other countries, parents in the U.S. must shoulder the brunt of the cost, along with the educators who subsidize the system through their own low wages. Unfortunately, this cost is more than most working families can afford, and far beyond what most states pay providers who participate in the child care subsidy system.

This is especially true for infant and toddler care, where the science of early learning is just as complex as in the older years, and where parents expect and educators need low ratios and group sizes to keep children safe and thriving.

- › On average, and even before the pandemic, infant care cost 60% more to provide than pre-K, yet subsidy rates were just **27% higher**.
- › At the same time, provider compensation accounts for **almost 70%** of the cost of providing child care for infants, yet early childhood educators working with infants are earning disproportionately low wages within an already underpaid field.

The solution is to increase public investment in child care to cover the cost of providing quality care. This by definition must include competitive compensation that recognizes the skill, competency, and value of early childhood educators, and allows for the recommended ratios and group sizes that are needed for educators to want to do their jobs, and to do them safely and well.

As states attempt to address critical child care supply issues, policymakers must remember that regulations promote safety and quality in child care providers, and efforts to undermine them won't solve the supply problem—but will cause harm. Solving our child care crisis will require a large-scale public investment that allows providers to meet regulations based on best practices and do right by children and families.