

SCHOOLS AND MORE

Quality child care improves youngster's skills

BY MARSHA BASLOE

Durham's Partnership for Children

If you are a working parent with young children, there is one thing you just can't do without. And that's quality child care. Without adequate, safe, reliable child care many Durham residents simply could not work. Finding quality child care is one of the most important decisions parents can make for their young children. In Durham, nearly two-thirds of children are in households where parents or the single parent is in the workforce, so making sure child care is safe, nurturing and delivers optimal high-quality early learning experiences to prepare for school success is critical.

High-quality child care is not only important for working parents, it supports

the business community in creating and maintaining an educated, revenue-generating workforce. It also enables future economic success by assisting in the preparation of young children for opportunities in the new economy. Studies from the University of Chicago, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Harvard University (to name a few) found that high-quality child care settings increased the language and math skills that prepare children for kindergarten, graduation, post secondary education and the workforce.

Quality child care is costly. In Durham County, the average cost of child care for an infant in a 5-star center is \$933 a month or more than \$11,000 a year — more than double the cost of a college

education at UNC Chapel Hill. Even middle-income families feel the strain with some parents spending as much as 50 percent of their income on child care for two children.

All North Carolina licensed child care programs, except religious sponsored programs that don't choose to be rated, have a star-rating similar to the ratings found for other products and services with a scale from 1 to 5 Stars. A 1-Star license means the program meets North Carolina's basic minimum requirements. A 5-Star license means a program meets the voluntary enhanced standards required for the highest star level.

As you are searching for child care, make sure to:

- Contact Child Care Services Association's Choosing and Using Program at

(919) 403-6950 or access information at www.childcareservices.org. Funded by Durham's Partnership for Children, this program is staffed with counselors who provide information and referral about quality and availability of child care programs that best match your family's needs.

- Go to the North Carolina Division of Child Development's Web site at www.ncchildcare.net to search for child care programs. This site lets you review official child care records about programs' history reports and whether the facilities had past violations.

- Visit the site you are interested in more than once and visit during different times in the day.

- Ask questions about policies and procedures, daily

routines, behavior management and watch how teachers interact with young children in their care. Take notes to refer to later.

- Obtain recommendations from people you know or parents who place their children in the facility's care.

Durham's Partnership for Children views child care quality and affordability as a top priority. The Partnership has been working for 15 years across Durham County to build support for quality child care as a community issue because it impacts children, families, businesses who rely on a productive workforce and our local economy.

Marsha Basloe is the executive director of Durham's Partnership for Children. She can be reached at marsha@dpfc.net. This is the fourth of 12 articles published in Schools and More on the last Tuesday of each month.