



Improving Job Quality in the Childcare Sector

Assessing the JVS Job Quality Benchmarking Index

Jewish Vocational Service in Boston (JVS) was founded in 1938 during the Great Depression to assist Jewish immigrants struggling to enter the American workforce and support their families. Today, JVS is among the oldest and largest providers of adult education and workforce development services in Greater Boston, serving a diverse clientele representing over 90 nations, and speaking 50 languages, and helping people secure financial independence through educational and employment services. With over 80 years of demonstrated excellence in workforce development, JVS has a reputation for continuous innovation, building person-centered and performance-based models to improve outcomes and increase programmatic effectiveness.

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I. Introduction

As labor conditions remain tight across the U.S., businesses are competing for talent like never before. Employers have been forced to seek new ways to recruit and retain talented workers. At the same time, low-wage workers are seeking opportunities that offer stability and economic growth for themselves and their families. Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) in Boston sits at the intersection of both employers and jobseekers – helping employer partners attract and retain a productive workforce so companies can flourish, while helping job seekers gain marketable skills and negotiate the best employment opportunities available.

As the largest workforce development agency in greater New England, JVS Boston focuses on skills training, connecting clients to employers, and achieving upward economic mobility. Yet as economic inequality poses a crucial challenge to our economy and society, job quality has become an essential component for these workforce development efforts. Increasing the number of high-quality jobs is essential to provide individuals and families with the benefits of their labor and give them the opportunity to not only achieve economic stability but also to thrive.



Yet how can any workforce development organization know whether they have helped place a worker into a high-quality job? Beyond simply looking at earnings, what qualifies as a “good job” includes many characteristics that are hard to measure. This makes it difficult for service organizations to assist job seekers when comparing different information across a variety of job options. Similarly, if employers are going to be successful at filling open positions, it’s essential that they understand how their jobs stack up against similar employers. To address these concerns, JVS Boston developed the Job Quality Benchmarking Index (JQBI): an internal benchmarking tool that can be used to assess an employer’s job quality and provide targeted information that they can use to re-design certain elements of a job over time to better meet employee needs.

This tool was developed with the insight of the JVS Boston talent pool and the culmination of a client survey that asked job seekers to rank elements of a job that were most salient to them. From their responses, 5 pillars emerged and are the foundation of the benchmarking tool. They are:

1. Salary/Wage
2. Benefits
3. Schedule
4. Supportive Work Environment (including Safety, DEI, Supportive Leadership and Professional Development)
5. Access to a Career Ladder

The agency’s 3-year strategic plan, to be rolled out in 2024, includes a priority on job quality. Specifically, increasing the quality of jobs in the sectors in which they train, being a reliable source of key business intel to shift employer practice and partnering with

employers so they can better understand the current talent pool and be more engaging to their future and incumbent workforce.

Finally, the plan includes tracking the percentage of clients in what JVS Boston generally defines as a quality job; one that pays, at minimum, Boston's living wage, offers full-time hours and full-benefits upon hire.

A. The Importance of Job Quality

Since 2017, JVS Boston has focused on improving job quality so that Boston-area residents, especially those who have been underserved and historically marginalized, have better access to opportunities to build wealth and obtain solid financial footing. At the same time, JVS Boston has been helping employers attract and retain the best workers, particularly as more companies are having difficulty filling positions in the post-pandemic labor market. A key component of this work has been the development of the JVS Boston Job Quality Benchmarking Index – a survey and qualitative tool that generates reports for employer partners to demonstrate how their jobs stack up against their competitors on the five “job pillars” that matter most to job seekers: Wages, Benefits, Scheduling, Access to Career Ladders, and Supportive Environment.

Unlike other tools, the JQBI's five pillars allow JVS Boston to measure job quality based on specific workplace practices rather than using a broad-brush descriptor. This flexible methodology proved particularly useful during the 2020 pandemic when the nature of work shifted radically to expand remote work. For example, prior to children attending school over Zoom, the value of a flexible schedule was likely underestimated by employers, yet this change was able to be captured by the JQBI survey questions that

comprise the Scheduling pillar. Similarly, during the onset of the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, the physical work environment took on new meaning with regards to employee feelings of safety, prompting the addition of safety as well as diversity and inclusion measures under the Supportive Work Environment pillar.

Since launching the JQBI in 2017, JVS Boston has issued over 245 job quality reports to employers about their entry- and mid-level positions. These reports provided information on how firms stacked up to their peers within the industry across the five pillars of job quality (wages, benefits, schedule, career ladders and supportive environment). Although job quality has always been a concern for many of these positions, the JQBI was implemented during a critical time when key aspects of job quality shifted in response to the pandemic. Armed with this data, many JVS Boston employer partners have made incremental, and in some cases dramatic, improvements in the quality of their jobs. The purpose of this research was to conduct and disseminate an industry case study which demonstrates the impact of employers' job quality redesigns on employees as well as their companies/organizations.

B. Industry Case Study: Early Childcare Centers

We chose the childcare sector for three reasons.

First, the pandemic highlighted both the critical role that the childcare industry plays in the economy as well as an urgent need for improving job quality for childcare workers.

Second, JVS Boston has played an important role in training people for this field through their Early Childhood Education (ECE)

employment pipeline program that provides a stipend, full-time job placement, and customized training to individuals seeking to launch a career in this field as the industry attempts to return to pre-pandemic workforce levels.

Third, JVS Boston had a combination of strong quantitative data, with over 50 childcare organizations completing the JQBI survey, as well as strong relationships with employers, which gave us the opportunity to collect qualitative information on both the decision-making process of these organizations and the lived experience of their employees.



While the childcare system has always been an essential component of the economic infrastructure supporting the state's work force, it has now become a necessary factor in helping parents return to the workforce after the pandemic. However, the disruption caused by the pandemic has exacerbated the industry's long-standing challenges such as the slim operating margins for providers, the lack of affordable care for families, and the long wait lists—especially for low-income childcare voucher holders. In addition, the tight labor market has laid bare pre-existing concerns about job quality and the ability of the industry to attract workers, with dire consequences for the state's labor force participation and economic growth. As such, the childcare sector provides an important

case study for studying the impact of the JQBI on organizations, employees, and the broader industry landscape.

Moreover, while the height of the COVID-19 pandemic might be a few years behind us, the childcare industry is still struggling to recover. In March of 2020, the COVID19 pandemic resulted in an unprecedented shock to childcare arrangements—both formal and informal—most notably with the abrupt closure of daycares and schools. Due to closures and plummeting enrollments, the childcare industry suffered an enormous loss of revenue during the pandemic. For example, in Massachusetts the initial guidelines limited preschool classrooms that previously accommodated 20 children to only 10, reducing the capacity of childcare centers as well as their revenues by half.ⁱ

Given that daycares had already operated on slim profit margins prior to the pandemic, restrictions regarding social distancing coupled with strictly regulated teacher-child ratios meant either steep increases in tuition for families or going out of business. A recent report from the Boston Opportunity Agenda found that there were 5,000 fewer early-childhood educators in Massachusetts in 2021 compared to 2019. And as recently as the spring of 2022, 35 percent of center-based childcare programs still reported being unable to operate at full capacity.ⁱⁱ

The consequences of the continued uncertainty surrounding childcare has had a multitude of consequences for families—both in terms of work-life balance as well as earnings capacity. A national survey of working parents conducted in April 2020 found that nearly two-thirds (63%) of parents had difficulty finding childcare, including 33 percent who found it very difficult—nearly double what parents had reported just six months earlier. Another national survey

conducted by Northeastern University further revealed that 13 percent of working parents reported that they had lost a job or reduced their hours due to a lack of childcare. On average, parents were losing a full day of work (8 hours) each week to address their children's needs during the pandemic for a total of 15 hours per week, which could represent a significant hit to total household income.

The lack of childcare during the pandemic was felt even more acutely in Massachusetts where COVID restrictions were more severe, childcare regulations were more stringent, and the state's reliance on childcare exceeded the national average. A 2020 survey of 2,300 parents of young children found that 61 percent of parents said that they were "struggling to work from home without childcare." Half of the parents surveyed said that they "will not be able to return to work without a consistent childcare solution for my child."ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, 84 percent of parents in Massachusetts said that they were "worried that my child is missing out on important developmental opportunities (socialization and learning)" while daycares were closed.

As with many other aspects of social and economic inequality, the childcare disruption associated with COVID-19 continues to take a greater toll on Black and Hispanic communities, exposing large racial disparities in access to childcare.^{iv} Indeed, the Northeastern University survey found that the loss of hours due to lack of childcare is greater for women of color, women without a college degree, and women living in low-income households—groups which lost 9 or more hours per week, likely due to working in essential industries that required in-person work. Moreover, households that were low-income, less educated, and

nonwhite were less likely to have any type of back-up childcare.^v

While the height of the COVID-19 pandemic might be a few years behind us, Massachusetts' childcare industry is still struggling to recover with important consequences for the broader economy. As daycares have since re-opened, the loss of childcare slots during the pandemic has meant that the cost of childcare, which was high even before the pandemic, has become even more expensive for families. For example, the Boston Opportunity Agenda report found that between 2018 and 2021, the average yearly tuition for infant care in Boston increased by about \$1,300 to \$21,269 per year. The tuition hike for toddler care was even steeper, increasing by about \$5,600 to reach \$19,402 per year.

Childcare is a critical piece of our economic infrastructure that enables parents to "get to work" just like roads and bridges do for commuters. Millions of working adults rely on school and childcare systems to facilitate their participation in the workforce. When problems with childcare arise, parents must scramble to find alternative options or miss work to care for their children. For millions of parents, that insecurity can mean working fewer hours, taking a pay cut, or leaving their jobs altogether.^{vi} When access to childcare limits parental employment, businesses cannot operate at full capacity, and overall economic growth slows.^{vii}

A fully inclusive economic recovery simply cannot happen if we are unable to attract enough workers to the childcare industry to meet the needs of families. Increasing job quality is essential to meet the demand for childcare services, especially in a tight labor market where providers are competing with other sectors to hire qualified workers. As such, the JQBI can play an important role in

providing employers with a multi-faceted measure of job quality that can be used as a diagnostic self-assessment for re-designing jobs across the five pillars.

C. Research Goals

In partnership with JVS Boston, a team of researchers from Northeastern University documented the use of the JQBI by employer partners within the childcare industry and any subsequent actions taken to improve job quality. Specifically, the research team explored the following questions to assess the impact of the JQBI on both companies and their employees:

- Did taking the JQBI survey and receiving the benchmarking report lead to a change in employer policies and practices?
- In what ways did employer partners seek to improve job quality across the five pillars (wages, benefits, schedule, career ladders and supportive environment)?
- Have these changes had an impact on the companies who took the survey in terms of revenue, attracting and retaining employees, and productivity?
- Have these changes had an impact on the employees in terms of increasing household income, reducing second jobs, expanding health insurance and retirement benefits, and quality of life?
- How can the JQBI be used to improve job quality more broadly across the childcare sector in Greater Boston?

To measure these impacts, the research team conducted a mixed methods study that combines quantitative data painting the landscape of the childcare industry in terms of employment, skill requirements, and wages alongside a set of qualitative interviews that captures actual changes in employer practices and the lived experiences of their employees. Contextualizing the qualitative data within the broader industry landscape, enabled us to understand whether the experiences of employer partners was representative of the Greater Boston childcare sector. Comparing information across the employer and employee interviews for the same organization allowed us to explore whether the job quality redesigns had their intended effect.

Finally, while the primary goal of this research was to document the impact on employer partners, it's also helpful to consider the broader impacts on the local economy through potential spillovers. For example, one employer raised wages by \$2 an hour for 450 employees in response to taking the JQBI survey. These employees now have greater potential to support their families, often by purchasing additional goods and services, adding to overall consumer spending and potentially spurring additional job growth. In addition, the state also benefits from the increased taxable income that these workers now earn. And the employer may be able to retain these workers longer, saving them the time and money it takes to fill open positions (and possibly work understaffed for a period of time).

II. Overview of the Job Quality Benchmarking Index

A. Development and Launch

The JQBI survey is designed to provide an immediately understandable business intel to readers. Specifically, it provides an overview on 5 pillars deemed valuable by JVS Boston job seekers. To derive these job quality pillars, JVS Boston surveyed client-facing staff and job seekers across each of its programs, asking them to rank the categories set forth by the “Job Design Framework” development by the National Fund, a well-respected resource and basis for work in this area. The resulting pillars, which were narrowed and merged based on client responses, included Wages, Benefits, Scheduling, Access to Career Ladders, and Supportive Environment.^{viii}

Based on these job pillars, JVS Boston worked with a capstone team from Northeastern University to develop a set of survey questions that could be used to assess quality within each category. Once the questions were written, JVS Boston assembled a group of internal experts and scored the answers to each question based on national data, employer and job seeker feedback, research evidence and best practices from the field. The scores were then aggregated for each pillar which ultimately served as the basis for an overall “Job Quality Profile” which is included in the summary report developed for each employer.

After testing the survey and reporting mechanisms, JVS Boston piloted the survey with a handful of employers in the direct care sector. Initially, employers were asked to answer the survey based on all entry level roles, but JVS quickly realized the difficulty this presented as not all entry-level jobs are the same. For example, a hospital pharmacy

technician and a food service worker – while both considered “entry level” – have a dramatically different pay, benefit, and scheduling structures. Therefore, JVS Boston determined it was best to compare apples to apples – and asked companies to answer the survey based on only one entry level position. Feedback from each of these steps has helped JVS Boston to make improvements to the index over time.

The finalized version of the JQBI is now housed in custom designed software platform developed by **Gibbs Software Solutions**.^{ix} In a process of continuous improvement, JVS Boston makes enhancements to the index on an annual basis that includes reviewing the scoring mechanism questions, and software functionality, both internally as well as with JQBI users, experts in the field, licensees and other partners to ensure that it is keeping pace with the ever-changing labor market.

B. Implementation Process

Once the JQBI had been through the pilot phase, JVS Boston began deploying the tool more broadly through multiple rounds of its Early Childhood Education (ECE) pipeline program. The first cohort of employer partners took the JQBI in 2021 followed by a second cohort in May 2022 and two additional rounds during September and October of that year. In each case, employers completed a 35-question survey that consisted of five modules corresponding the five job quality pillars developed by JVS Boston. Once the survey was completed, JVS Boston scored the resulting answers using their pre-defined rubric and that information was used to generate two types of reports. The first was an overall free summary report that was directly emailed to the employer

partner (See Appendix A for a sample of the JQBI summary report). The email which shared this summary report also offered the recipient the ability to request a detailed report and coaching support by the JVS Boston team for a fee.

All childcare employers who participated in the JQBI were invited to participate in one of several discussion series sponsored by Neighborhood Villages, who serves as a sector leader in advocacy for early education

and care reforms, upskilling childcare workers and building innovative solutions for and with providers across the state. Each discussion series consisted of five meetings to address one or two job quality pillars (or sub-pillars) per session. During each virtual meeting, the impact of these practices on the low-wage worker and strategies to improve the job quality in the area were discussed.

III. Data and Methods

A. Quantitative Landscape Analysis

Before delving into the qualitative interviews, the research team conducted a landscape analysis of the childcare industry to understand the dramatic changes of the sector during the pandemic. This included a look back over the past five years to compare trends before versus after the pandemic in terms of number of establishments, employment levels, job posting activity, employer skill requirements, wages, and worker characteristics.

1. Definition of the childcare industry

While it might seem obvious to identify firms in the childcare industry by simple observation, it's less clear when using aggregate labor market data compiled by government or industry sources. In addition, childcare encompasses a broad set of activities, but JVS Boston and the JQBI focus more narrowly on the care of children in paid arrangements by a day-care center rather than a babysitter, nanny or other provider. Even within this definition, there is considerable variation in childcare arrangements by daycare centers versus after-school programs or summer camps.

Thus, in our landscape analyses we restricted our attention more narrowly to the “Childcare Day Care Services” (NAICS code 624410)^x which comprises establishments primarily engaged in providing day care of infants or children. These establishments (e.g., nursery schools, preschool centers, and child or infant day care centers) generally care for preschool-aged children, but may care for older children when they are not in school and may also offer pre-kindergarten and/or

kindergarten educational programs. This category excludes other “Youth Services” such as adoption agencies, foster-care placement services, youth centers, and youth self-help organizations.

When looking at trends in job posting activity, employer skill requirements, and wages, we further restricted our attention to certain occupations within the “Childcare Day Care Services.” These were occupations that aligned with the entry level positions that JVS Boston employers referenced when taking the JQBI survey as well as their subsequent potential career pathways. For example, these occupations included Childcare Workers (SOC code 39-9011),^{xi} Preschool Teachers (SOC code 25-2011), Special Education Teachers, Preschool (SOC code 25-2051), and Education and Childcare Administrators, Preschool and Daycare (SOC code 11-9031) but excluded Family Support Workers (SOC codes 21-1021, 21-1022, 21-1023). Even among the 5 occupations that we included, we further excluded specific job titles within those occupations that did not align with the types of positions that JVS Boston employers were referencing in their JQBI surveys. Thus, we excluded job titles such as nannies, baby sitters, before and after school teachers, Montessori and academy teachers, behavior interventionists, substitute teachers, and care attendants.

2. Data sources and measures

With those definitions of the childcare industry and childcare workers established, we then analyzed trends over time before and after the pandemic for a variety of labor market indicators. These included number of establishments, employment levels, job posting activity, employer skill requirements, wages, and worker characteristics. Table 1

provides the source of each data series as well as the years covered in our analysis.

Table 1. Data Sources for Landscape Analysis

Data Series	Source	Analysis Years
Number of establishments	U.S. Census	2012-2022
Employment	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics	2012-2023
Job postings	Lightcast, Inc.	2019-2023
Employer skill requirements	Lightcast, Inc.	2019-2023
Wages	Lightcast, Inc.	2019-2023
Worker characteristics	American Community Survey	2019-2023

B. Qualitative Assessment of Job Quality

In addition to our landscape analysis of the childcare industry, we also conducted qualitative interviews using an inductive data analysis process that has been widely used for similar research (Miles and Huberman 1994, Locke 2000, Glaser and Strauss 2017). We first documented the experiences of employer partners using the JQBI, whether they had made any changes in terms of job quality in response to the information that was presented, and the implications for both their organizations and their employees. We then interviewed a set of employees who were placed by JVS Boston in these same organizations to capture their lived experiences and determine the degree to which their perceptions of job quality were aligned with that of their employers.

1. Interview sample and response rate

For this study, we interviewed 20 individuals across both the employer and employee groups. The names and contact information for all participants were included in two lists provided by JVS Boston—one of employers and one of client employees—and JVS Boston staff made the initial request for an interview via email. Once the subject

responded, then the Northeastern research team replied and scheduled the interview with the individual.

The response rate varied considerably across the two groups despite offering each an appropriate incentive to participate. For employers, we offered to provide a summary of our findings (subject to JVS Boston approval) which could be beneficial information for future planning. Of the 19 employers that we contacted, 13 responded and were interviewed by the research team resulting in a 68 percent response rate.

From among the list of employers, 8 sites were unique in that JVS Boston had placed clients who successfully completed their Early Childcare Educator pipeline program at those locations.

In anticipation of a lower response rate from among this vulnerable low-income population, we offered JVS Boston client employees a \$50 gift card to compensate them for their time. Of the 44 employees that we contacted across those 8 sites, we were able to interview 8 JVS Boston client employees from 3 of those sites, resulting in an overall employee response rate of 18 percent. However, given that employees were recent immigrants, situated in low-income households, and often single-parents

themselves, the lower response rate is actually well-aligned with other research studying vulnerable populations.

Employer Partners

In terms of job quality, the employer interview sample was fairly representative of the pool of 50 childcare employers that had taken the JQBI. Among the list of 19 employers that JVS Boston contacted, the overall average JQBI percentage score was comparable to that of all childcare centers that had taken the survey (54 percent versus 50 percent). Similarly, although not all employers chose to accept the invitation to interview with the research team, those that did also had an average score (54 percent) that was similar to the overall pool of JQBI survey takers. There was also fair representation among the employers who were interviewed by rank: only 3 employers ranked in the top 10, 1 ranked in the bottom 10 and the rest were in the middle of the pack. Finally, 3 employers had taken the JQBI

more than once which allowed us to observe changes in their scores over time. Two of the three experience significant increases in their JQBI scores which suggests that the survey accurately captures changes in job quality and can be used by employers as a tool for continuous improvement.

Among the 13 individuals who were interviewed by the research team, the individual roles of the people who spoke to us on behalf of JVS Boston employers varied widely. Table 2 shows that some were the owners and founders of a single center, while others oversaw one location among several. Regardless of their official roles, many had also interviewed and hired JVS Boston clients. The organizations themselves covered a spectrum from non-profit to for-profit. The diversity of roles and organizations allowed the research team to gain a broad understanding of the employers who took the JQBI and makes the commonality of some shared views more striking.

Table 2. Organizational Characteristics of Employer Interview Subjects

Organizational Characteristic	Percent of Sample
Role of Staff Member Interviewed	
Founder/Executive/Regional Director	33.3%
Center/Administrative/HR/Learning Director	33.3%
Other	33.3%
Number of Employees	
10-49 employees	33.3%
50-249 employees	58.3%
250 or more employees	8.3%
Program Characteristics	
Dual Language Program	16.7%
Program has Non-Profit Status	25.0%
Program Operates as a Standalone Center	33.3%

Source: Data collected during interviews and market research by the research team.

JVS Boston Client Employees

The original list of clients provided to the research team included the names and contact information of 44 individuals that had been trained by JVS Boston and placed with employers. The clients were contacted initially by JVS Boston via email and informed about our study. We then followed up with the clients individually using both email and text message to schedule interviews. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the JVS Boston clients, including evening and weekend times. Ultimately, eight clients volunteered to be interviewed and received a \$50 Amazon gift card to compensate them for their time.

All of the JVS Boston clients that we interviewed had started their careers in the childcare industry as teaching assistants. Some had since advanced to become teachers by finishing their state mandated academic and in-classroom teaching requirements. It is important to note that this sample was not definitively representative of the entire childcare teacher population, particularly those employed in the industry prior to the pandemic, but shared many of the same traits as are observed by national studies of childcare workers.

Table 3 below shows that all of our interview subjects were female which is aligned with childcare being a heavily female dominated occupation. The majority were Black or Hispanic and most client employees spoke another language other than English which corresponds with JVS Boston serving a

largely immigrant population. Half of our client interview subjects were age 25-34 which is typical for workers who have recently participated in a job training program.

Most of the JVS Boston clients that we interviewed had some college credit or community college certification which is typically required for pre-school teacher and assistant roles. For example, Massachusetts requires infant-toddler or pre-school teachers to have (1) a high school diploma if they are under 21 years old, and (2) a 3-credit college course in Child Growth and Development or Human Growth and Development. Other courses may substitute for Child Growth and Development and workers can also substitute it with (1) a valid Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) from the Council for Professional Recognition, (2) a Chapter 74 and EEC Approved High School childcare program in Massachusetts, a (3) a recommendation letter from the high school program director, and (4) a copy of your high school diploma and official transcript.^{xii}

Three-quarters of the sample were single and/or had a child under age 12 living in their household. Again, this is typical of childcare workers, many of whom seek discounted childcare for their own children. Indeed, Massachusetts created a pilot program in January of 2023 to provide immediate access to vouchers and contracted slots to income eligible staff working in licensed and funded early education and care programs.^{xiii}

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Client Employee Interview Subjects

Demographic Characteristic	Percent of Sample
Female	100.0%
Race/Ethnicity	
African American / Black, White/Caucasian	50.0%
Asian / Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	25.0%
Hispanic (Latino/Latina)	12.5%
Other race	12.5%
Language Spoken at Home	
English	25.0%
Chinese	25.0%
Spanish or Portuguese	25.0%
Cape Verdean/French/Haitian Creole	12.5%
Did not respond	12.5%
Age	
18-24 years	12.5%
25-34 years	50.0%
25-44 years	37.5%
Educational Attainment	
High school degree	12.5%
Some college credit or community college certificate	62.5%
Associate's degree	0.0%
Bachelor's degree	12.5%
Advanced or professional degree (Master's degree, JD, MD, MBA)	12.5%
Marital Status	
Single	75.0%
Married	25.0%
Number of People in Household	
One	12.5%
Two	37.5%
Three	37.5%
Four	12.5%
Children Under 12 in Household	
One	50.0%
Two	25.0%
Did not respond	25.0%

Source: Anonymous Qualtrics survey of client employee interview subjects conducted by the research team.

2. Interview procedure

Two different interview guides – one for clients and one for employers – were developed by the research team and then jointly discussed and edited with JVS Boston. Each interview guide was prefaced with information mandated by Northeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) indicating to the interviewees that their answers will remain anonymous and any identifying information will be omitted from materials given to JVS Boston or any other entity now or in the future. We feel it is also important to note that, as an additional precaution, the protocol used for clients specifically avoided asking clients to identify their employer.

Each interview was conducted over Zoom and participants were asked if their interview could be recorded. Every interview participant consented to have their interview recorded prior to the commencement of the interview. Some interviews were conducted by two members of the Northeastern team and some by one member. One interview included three Northeastern team members. Each interview but one included a single interviewee, while one had two interviewees representing a single employer.

All our interviews were semi-structured. The interview questions were open-ended so - while the subjects covered in each interview were consistent – the answers contained significant individualized perceptions. When appropriate, interviewees were asked follow-up questions to probe or clarify an answer. The employer conversations were supplemented with data provided by JVS Boston on the size of the individual organizations. Client interviews were supplemented with a separate demographic

survey created with Qualtrics, as well as data from JVS Boston shared in a way that allowed the Northeastern team to both identify the client's employer and continue to maintain client anonymity. For privacy reasons, we use pseudonyms or general descriptions for all interviewees, whether they are JVS Boston employer partners or client employees.

3. Analysis method

We analyzed the data using an inductive approach looking for common themes.^{xiv} The interview recordings were transcribed initially by Rev.com's AI tool and then checked by hand for accuracy. Transcripts were then reviewed in depth by the researchers using NVivo. Since we were primarily interested in perceptions of JVS Boston and the JQBI survey, we began by searching for themes connected to those subjects and items related to them. To surface additional themes and relationships, we approached our analysis by iterating across the data – comparing results between and across each category of interviewee – as well as incorporating our own emergent theoretical ideas and regular feedback from our JVS Boston partners.^{xv}

We continuously adjusted our theoretical inclinations and second level coding categories based on our interviews and the data culled from them. The thematic constructs from our conversations were derived inductively and assessed for overall support across subjects.^{xvi} See the Data Appendix for our detailed analysis of the initial coding along with representative quotes from both employers and employees during our qualitative interviews.

IV. Quantitative Landscape Analysis

A. The Importance of the Childcare Industry

Organized childcare plays an important role in the lives of families as well as the broader economy in four distinct ways. First, the childcare industry provides direct employment to many low-wage workers, boosting aggregate consumer spending. Prior to the pandemic in 2019, the industry produced \$1.69 billion in direct revenue and employed nearly 39,100 workers in Massachusetts.^{xvii}

However, childcare providers walk a financial tightrope to provide quality care and pay competitive wages. Even before the pandemic, childcare programs were operating on razor-thin margins and there is little room for providers to make up for that lost revenue, since the vast majority of funds go to payroll and rent.^{xviii} Given that childcare is a labor-intensive business, there is little opportunity to achieve economies of scale and no technological innovation that can lower the cost of care.^{xix} In Massachusetts, average earnings per worker of \$22,768 per year are well below the state median, especially for entry level positions, such that nearly half of all childcare workers were eligible for public assistance, even prior to the pandemic.

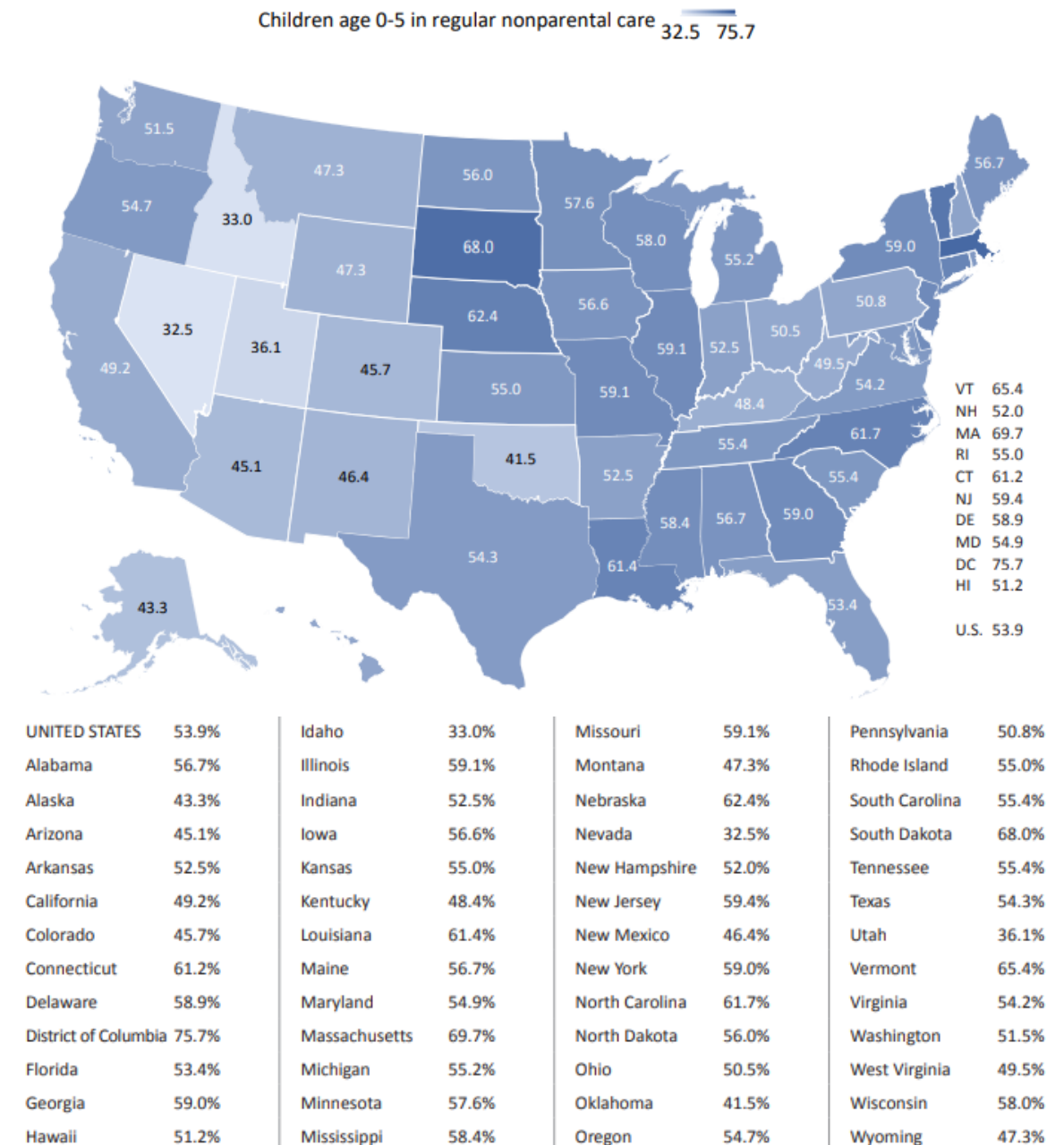


Second, childcare supports economic growth primarily through its support of increased labor force participation among parents. Unlike roads and bridges, which became less necessary during the pandemic with the increase in remote work, childcare is a critical piece of infrastructure that allows parents to get to work. Even prior to the pandemic, American businesses lost an estimated \$12.7 billion annually because of their employees' childcare challenges. Nationally, the cost of lost earnings, productivity, and revenue due to lack of childcare totaled \$57 billion each year.

In Massachusetts, the childcare infrastructure is even more vital to ensuring a full employment economy given the state's high rate of childcare usage even prior to the pandemic. Figure 3 shows that the share of children ages 0-5 in non-parental care for more than 10 hours per week was 69.7 percent in Massachusetts compared to just 53.9 percent for the nation. In addition, female labor force participation is higher in Massachusetts, such that supporting the childcare industry is even more critical to preserving women's labor force opportunities compared to other states.

Increased labor force participation plays a role in economic growth in two primary ways.^{xx} The first is the direct increase in total employment, household earnings, and total economic output in a region as childcare assists new workers to enter the labor force or existing workers to work more hours. The second is the increase in demand for the market-based childcare industry as a greater share of parents entering the labor force choose to use organized childcare services.

Figure 3. Share of Children in Non-parental Care for More than 10 Hours per Week, 2019



Source: Calculations based on the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2016-2017 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) data query. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by Cooperative Agreement U59MC27866 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau (HRSA MCHB). Retrieved December 8, 2018 from www.childhealthdata.org. CAHMI: www.cahmi.org as reported in "Childcare in State Economies, 2019 Update." By the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board.

<https://www.ced.org/assets/reports/childcareimpact/181104%20CCSE%20Report%20Jan30.pdf>

Yet the greater demand for childcare in Massachusetts also leads to higher costs compared to other states. The cost of organized childcare is steep and varies widely based upon the age of the child and the type of childcare provider chosen. Over the past two decades, the cost of childcare has more than doubled, while wages have remained mostly stagnant.^{xxi} Before the pandemic, infant center-based care for a

single child was approximately 17.8 percent of U.S. median household income and exceeded the cost of college tuition in 28 states and the District of Columbia—including Massachusetts where the cost of childcare as a percentage of median income was 26.4 percent.^{xxii} Table 4 shows that the average cost for infant daycare was \$326 per week in Massachusetts, second only to Washington D.C. in 2023.

Table 4. Top 5 Most Expensive States for daycare (infants) as of 2023

State	Weekly Rate
Washington D.C.	\$417
Massachusetts	\$326
Washington	\$310
California	\$288
Connecticut	\$260

Source: Care.com annual survey <https://www.care.com/c/how-much-does-child-care-cost/>

Third, childcare helps reduce inequality across groups by boosting labor force participation, hours worked, and skill development among low-income workers while contributing to economic growth and productivity over the long-term.^{xxiii} This is especially important for BIPOC families who were more likely to live in childcare deserts with few childcare options, even before the coronavirus pandemic. According to state

data, more than 16,000 income-eligible children were on waitlists for care in Massachusetts as of February 2022.^{xxiv} Table 5 shows that Massachusetts ranked 5th in terms of the dollar amount of childcare subsidies and offsets per child in paid care (\$657) prior to the pandemic. The state has since expanded these subsidies during the pandemic through the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants.

Table 5. Top 10 States by Income Share of Childcare Expenditures per Child, 2019

Region	Federal & State Subsidies and Cost Offsets				÷	Children of Child Care Ages 0 to 14	=	Subsidies and Cost Offsets per Child	÷	Median Household Income	=	Share of Income	Rank
	TANF	CCDF	Child & Dependent Care Credit	Total									
Delaware	\$79,081,463	\$26,193,485	\$14,106,000	\$119,380,948		165,598		\$720.91		\$74,194		0.97%	1
Vermont	32,255,245	25,908,096	7,571,000	65,734,341		93,059		706.37		74,305		0.95%	2
Dist. of Columbia	59,117,060	24,407,161	10,533,000	94,057,221		113,591		828.03		93,111		0.89%	3
Rhode Island	45,351,622	31,863,273	10,984,000	88,198,895		166,866		528.56		70,151		0.75%	4
Massachusetts	334,775,956	289,309,648	97,774,000	721,859,604		1,099,451		656.56		87,707		0.75%	5
New Mexico	47,275,952	94,206,431	12,748,000	154,230,383		391,397		394.05		53,113		0.74%	6
Pennsylvania	506,840,658	481,149,041	141,597,000	1,129,586,699		2,184,126		517.18		70,582		0.73%	7
New York	467,811,585	919,703,899	257,498,000	1,645,013,484		3,293,255		499.51		71,855		0.70%	8
Wisconsin	201,426,341	220,621,459	59,095,000	481,142,800		1,049,353		458.51		67,355		0.68%	9
Illinois	495,255,920	500,790,519	151,298,000	1,147,344,439		2,291,123		500.78		74,399		0.67%	10

Source: Committee on Economic Development.

Finally, we should not overlook that childcare provides developmentally appropriate activities for children that can help reduce future achievement gaps, thereby indirectly stimulating economic growth. Childcare also boosts economic growth by enhancing school readiness and improving educational outcomes among children. Age 0 to 3 is a crucial time for learning, and having secure attachments to adult caregivers, including early childhood educators, can help promote healthy development.^{xxv} The early learning opportunities provided by pre-schools can help reduce achievement gaps between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers that emerge well before kindergarten and largely persist throughout K–12.^{xxvi}

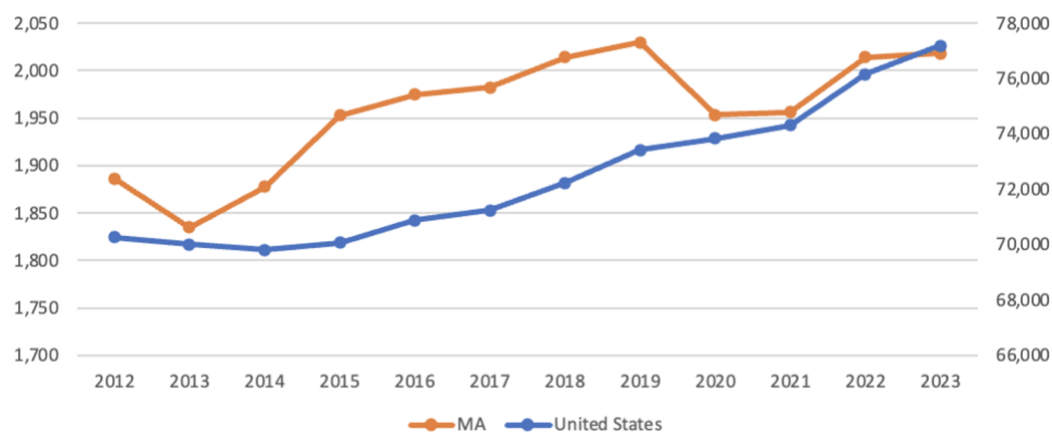
B. Childcare Employment Trends

The formal childcare sector consists of a large network of small businesses, either public or private, that are regulated and taxed by both state and federal authorities. Although three-quarters of children are served by large childcare centers that operate

as employers (e.g., nursery schools, preschools, Head Start programs, summer camps, and facilities associated with religious organizations and companies), most childcare providers are home-based businesses operated by a sole proprietor (non-employers).^{xxvii} The JVS Boston JQBI is focused on a subset of this market, namely childcare centers, either stand-alone or as part of a chain.

During the COVID-19 pandemic when many daycares were shut down, the childcare industry suffered large revenue losses, particularly in Massachusetts where COVID restrictions were more stringent and in place for longer. As a result, many childcare providers closed their doors causing the number of licensed childcare centers to drop from 2,093 in 2019 to 2,060 in 2020.^{xxviii} Figure 4 shows that the total number of childcare establishments had still not fully recovered by 2022. In comparison, the number of establishments across the U.S. continued to increase, although at a slower rate during 2020, before resuming the prior upward trend in 2021.

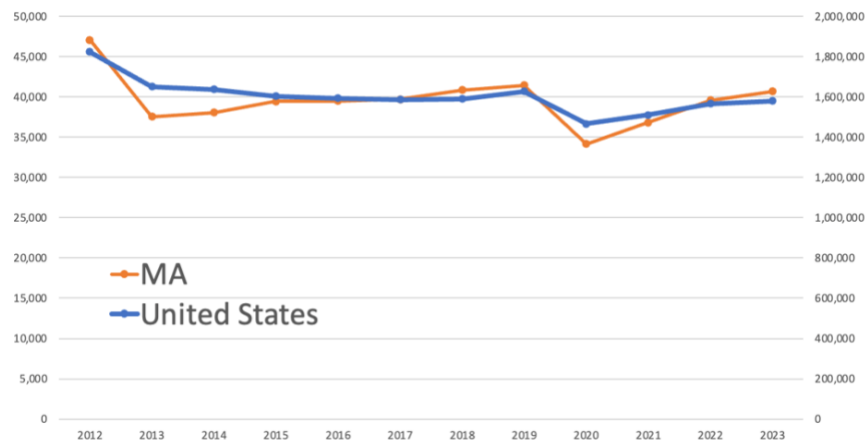
Figure 4. Annual Number of Childcare Establishments Over Time (2012-2023)



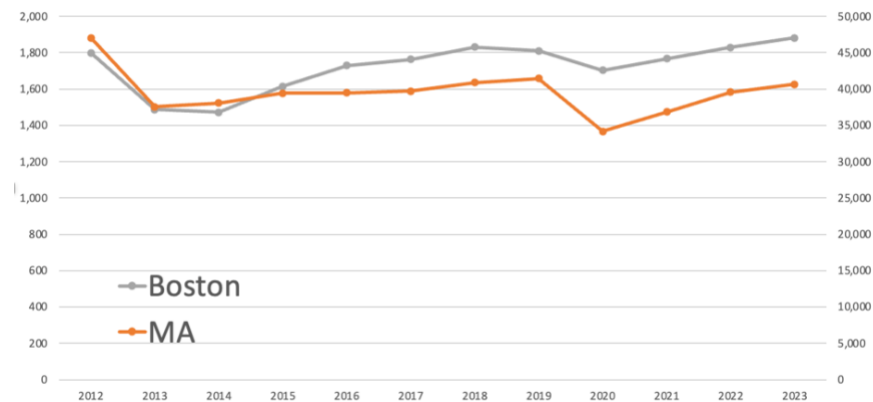
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 5. Annual Employment Level for Childcare Industry Over Time (2012-2023)

A. Massachusetts versus the U.S.



B. Boston versus Massachusetts



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

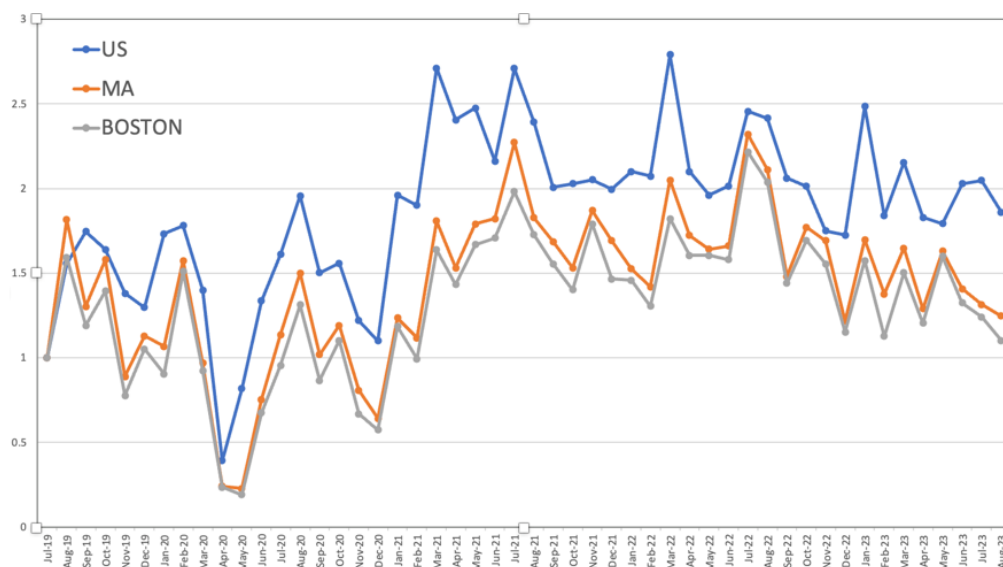
Not surprisingly, employment in the childcare sector fell sharply during the pandemic, along with every other service industry. Between March and April of 2020 351,500 childcare workers lost their jobs nationwide. Although the rest of the U.S. economy had recovered all of its jobs by June 2022, it was not until November 2023 when the childcare sector had regained all jobs lost during the pandemic-induced recession.

In Massachusetts, employment in the childcare industry recovered more quickly than the U.S. This is perhaps due to the strong labor market recovery in the state as well as higher rates of pay subsidized by the state through its Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants. Yet Figure 5 shows that employment in the state's childcare sector is still below that which would have occurred if it had continued its pre-pandemic upward trajectory prior to the pandemic. In addition,

the slow recovery of the childcare industry stands in stark contrast to the overall labor market in Massachusetts, which has already regained all jobs lost and now exceeds pre-pandemic job levels. In Boston, employment levels have recovered more rapidly and appear to be on a similar upward trajectory to what had existed prior to the pandemic.

The slower employment recovery in the childcare industry is not for a lack of demand. Between April 2020 and 2021 the number of childcare job postings surged as the economy rapidly re-opened and parents returned to work. Over the next 12 months the number of postings remained high as providers staffed up quickly to meet demand. Since then, the number of job postings has declined in 2023 across Boston, Massachusetts, and the nation—returning to pre-pandemic levels in Boston and Massachusetts but remaining elevated for the nation.

Figure 6. Monthly Number of Unique Job Postings for Child Day Care Services, 2019-2023 Indexed to July 2019



Both entry level and more advanced occupations are in high demand in the childcare industry across the nation. Table 6 shows that the top in-demand occupations

include pre-school teachers and education and childcare administrators. These jobs have a high posting intensity with 2 or 3 job ads per unique posting, indicating that employers

are posting their jobs in multiple ways to be able to hire workers as quickly as possible. Even then, the median number of days that posting is advertised is roughly one-month meaning that half the jobs take even longer than that to be filled before the posting is

taken down. Table 7 shows that Among entry level occupations, the top job titles that are in-demand and the posting intensity is very similar across geography. Most postings are for pre-school, childcare, and infant/toddler teachers

Table 6. Top In-Demand Occupations in the Childcare Industry, 2019-2023

	United States		Massachusetts		Boston	
Occupation Name	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration (Days)	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration (Days)	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration (Days)
Childcare Workers	3:1	30	2:1	29	2:1	28
Preschool Teacher, Except Special Education	3:1	31	3:1	31	3:1	31
Special Education Teachers, Preschool	2:1	28	1:1	20	2:1	35
Education and Childcare Administrators, Preschool and Daycare	3:1	30	2:1	31	2:1	31

Source: Calculations based on data from Lightcast, Inc.

Note: Posting Intensity is defined as the ratio of total job postings to unique (de-duplicated) job postings.

Table 7. Top Entry Level Job Titles in the Childcare Industry, 2019-2023

United States		Massachusetts		Boston	
Job Title	Posting Intensity	Job Title	Posting Intensity	Job Title	Posting Intensity
Preschool Teachers	2 : 1	Preschool Teachers	2 : 1	Preschool Teachers	3 : 1
Child Care Teachers	3 : 1	Child Care Teachers	3 : 1	Child Care Teachers	3 : 1
Infant/Toddler Teachers	3 : 1	Infant/Toddler Teachers	3 : 1	Infant/Toddler Teachers	3 : 1
Teachers	4 : 1	Teachers	4 : 1	Teachers	4 : 1
Toddler Teachers	2 : 1	Toddler Teachers	2 : 1	Toddler Teachers	2 : 1
Infant Teachers	3 : 1	Infant Teachers	3 : 1	Infant Teachers	3 : 1
Infant/Toddler/Preschool Teachers	2 : 1	Infant/Toddler/Preschool Teachers	2 : 1	Infant/Toddler/Preschool Teachers	2 : 1
Toddler/Preschool Teachers	2 : 1	Toddler/Preschool Teachers	2 : 1	Early Childhood Teachers	3 : 1
Preschool Teacher Assistants	2 : 1	Preschool Teacher Assistants	2 : 1	Preschool Teacher Assistants	2 : 1
Early Childhood Teachers	3 : 1	Early Childhood Teachers	3 : 1	Toddler/Preschool Teachers	2 : 1

Source: Calculations based on data from Lightcast, Inc.

C. Employer Skill Requirements for Childcare Jobs

Employers are posting a record number of open childcare positions, yet employment still remains below pre-pandemic levels or at least below the projected demand based on the prior upward trajectory. For example, among the employers that we interviewed which were also observed in the Lightcast data, companies have been posting two to four times as many job postings each year post-pandemic compared to 2019. Why is it taking so long for employers to find qualified workers? One factor that can affect the time it takes to hire is the types of skill requirements that employers put on their job postings.

In fact, excessive requirements for education and/or experience can create barriers to employment for entry-level workers. Alternatively, professional growth for incumbent workers can be stymied by the need for completion of college level classes to advance in their careers. For example, Table 8 shows that a lower share of entry-level childcare job postings (e.g., Pre-School Teacher Assistant) are open to workers with only a high school education in Boston and Massachusetts compared to the U.S. Instead, providers in Massachusetts are more likely to require a Bachelor's or even a Master's degree, particularly for Childcare Directors.

Similarly, a lower share of childcare job postings in Boston and Massachusetts are open to workers with no prior experience listed compared to the U.S. Instead, providers in Massachusetts are more likely to require some minimal level of experience.

Table 8. Minimum Skill Requirements for Childcare Job Postings, 2019-2023

A. Education Level

	Pre-School Teacher Assistant			Pre-School Teachers			Childcare Directors		
Education Level	US	MA	Boston	US	MA	Boston	US	MA	Boston
No Education Requirement Listed	32%	39%	41%	34%	38%	39%	28%	39%	37%
High school or GED	51%	47%	47%	40%	28%	28%	28%	12%	10%
Associate degree	13%	7%	5%	18%	20%	19%	19%	23%	24%
Bachelor's degree	4%	6%	6%	8%	12%	12%	25%	23%	25%
Master's degree	0%	1%	1%	0%	2%	2%	0%	3%	4%
Ph.D. or professional degree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

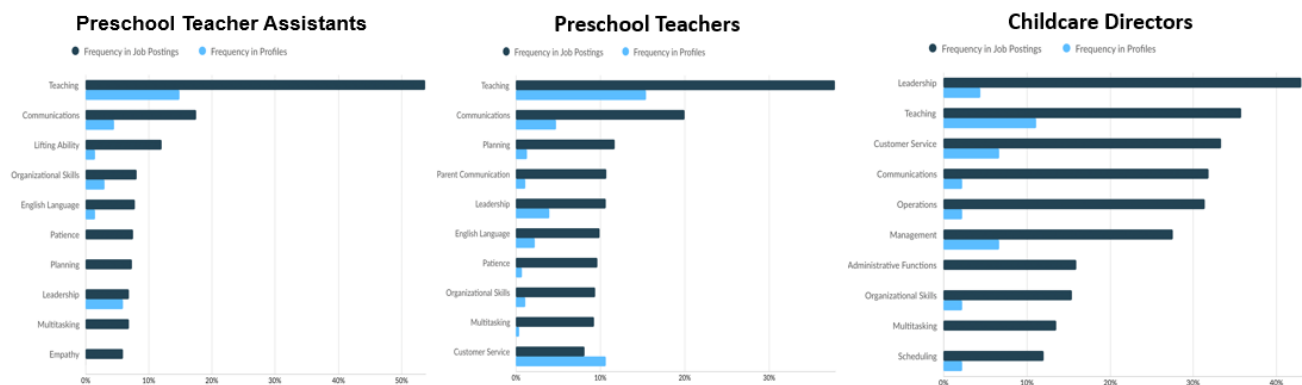
B. Experience Level

	Pre-School Teacher Assistant			Pre-School Teachers			Childcare Directors		
Minimum Experience	US	MA	Boston	US	MA	Boston	US	MA	Boston
No Experience Listed	75%	79%	78%	69%	63%	62%	45%	53%	53%
0 - 1 Years	17%	16%	15%	21%	26%	27%	23%	9%	10%
2 - 3 Years	7%	2%	2%	9%	10%	10%	27%	34%	33%
4 - 6 Years	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	5%	4%	4%
7 - 9 Years	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
10+ Years	0%	2%	3%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%

Rather than using degrees as a proxy for skills, we can also look at the actual skills that employers list on their job postings for the three most common childcare occupations. Not surprisingly there is a lot of overlap between Preschool Teacher Assistants and Preschool Teachers among the top skills that are in demand such as teaching and communication. However, some skills such as lifting ability and organizational skills are ranked higher for Assistants whereas other skills such as planning and parent communication are ranked higher for Teachers. In contrast, skills such as leadership, customer service, operations and

management rank higher for Childcare Directors. Yet, most of these skills seem like things that can be learned on the job or through certifications rather than requiring a college or advanced degree, suggesting that the educational requirements may pose a barrier that prevents some qualified workers from filling positions in the childcare industry. Moreover, looking at more specialized skills (see appendix) reveals even more overlap across these three roles with preschool education, child development and lesson planning among the top qualifications that are listed.

Figure 7. Top 10 Baseline Skills Demanded by Employers versus Listed on Profiles, 2019-2023



Source: Calculations based on data from Lightcast, Inc.

D. Wages and Benefits in the Childcare Industry

When employers complain about not being able to find skilled workers, most economists tell them to raise wages. Unfortunately, that's easier said than done in the childcare industry where the profit margins are thin due to the highly regulated and labor-intensive nature of the job. There are no ways to outsource or automate childcare to become more efficient, especially if we want to maintain a safe, loving, and developmentally appropriate

environment for our children. In addition, for providers who also accept childcare vouchers, reimbursement rates often fail to account for a number of factors, such as revenue instability due to families dipping into and out of care, which also serves to keep salaries low for childcare workers.

However, one of the silver linings that emerged from the pandemic shining a spotlight on the pre-existing childcare crisis was the federal subsidies that were put in place under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). ARPA provided \$39 billion in

emergency funding to stabilize the existing childcare sector—a historic investment that helped halt the closure of even more childcare programs and bolster supply for families desperate for care so that parents could continue working. The Century Foundation credits ARPA with saving 3.2 million childcare slots nationwide by shoring up providers to be able to cover more of the costs of care with federal funding.

For some providers, this has meant being able to meaningfully raise wages for the first time in years. Figure 8 shows that even prior to the pandemic, advertised salaries for the Childcare Industry in Boston and Massachusetts were higher than the U.S. Moreover, wages for childcare workers across all three places have been growing steadily over the past several years since the reopening of the economy post-COVID—in some cases by as much as 25 percent. Some of this is due to changing composition of the jobs that are in high demand, such as special education pre-school teachers who are typically paid higher wages, but part can also be attributed to actual wage increases within occupations due to the additional ARPA funding.

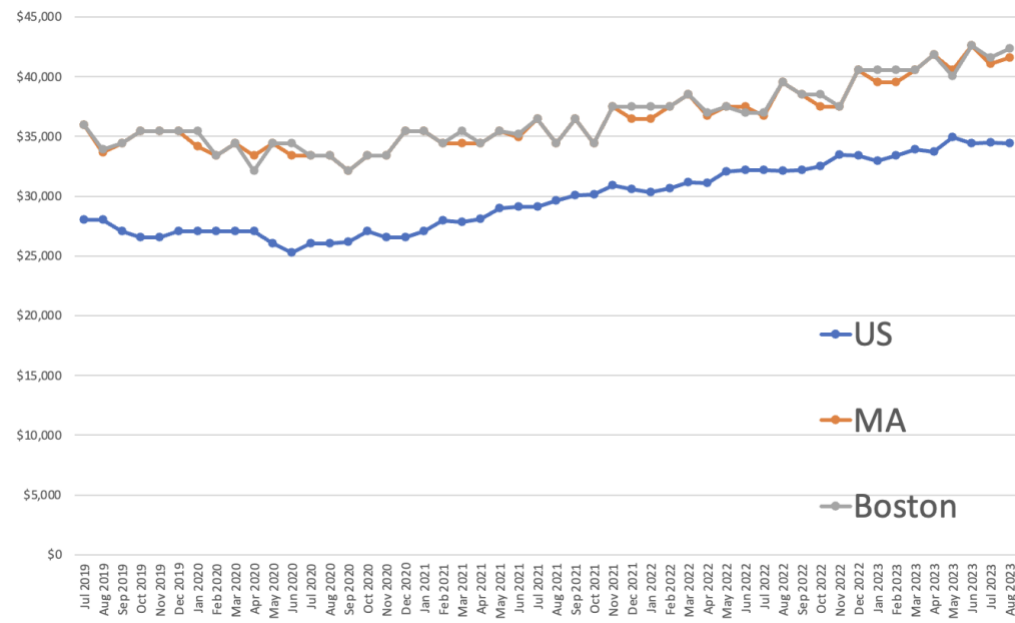
We can see this more clearly looking at the advertised salaries for Preschool Teachers specifically. Panel B of Figure 8 shows that wages for Preschool Teachers as a group

have also increased since 2020—even more so in Boston and Massachusetts than the nation. This is consistent with strong wage increases that have been documented across a number of entry-level positions at the bottom of the wage distribution across the whole economy.

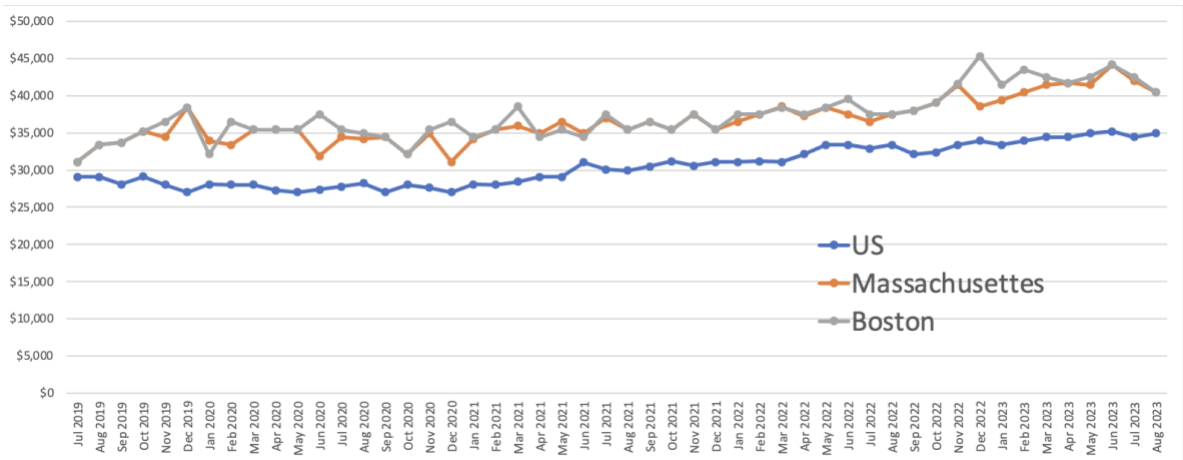
Yet ARPA is, by design, intended to meet a limited, short-term need. And the childcare sector—as a public good that boosts economic participation and growth, workforce development, and child well-being—needs permanent infrastructural and fiscal intervention to create lasting changes in access and affordability for families. Indeed, the federal subsidies expired this past September, jeopardizing more than 3 million childcare slots.^{xxix} Fortunately Massachusetts continued to fund the C3 subsidies for the coming year which has helped to bridge the gap. Yet, it's unclear whether Massachusetts can continue those subsidies in the longer run without additional federal support. In the latest government funding bill just approved by the White House, there's a \$1 billion increase for programs focused on childcare and early childhood learning. This new funding includes an additional \$275 million for the Head Start program and \$725 million for the Child Care and Development Block Grant.^{xxx}

Figure 8. Advertised Salary Trends for Childcare Industry, 2019-2023

A. All Childcare Workers



B. Preschool Teachers



Source: Calculations based on data from Lightcast, Inc.

Ensuring that providers can sustain these wages increases will be critical for childcare workers—a racially diverse and vulnerable population—to maintain a stable source of living in a high-cost state such as Massachusetts. Comparing the educational distribution of all workers in Massachusetts

to those in the childcare industry, Table 9 shows that childcare workers are less likely to have a college degree and more likely to have completed only some college coursework or to have not even finished high school—limiting their opportunities for a stable, high-paying job in other sectors.

Table 9. Educational Distribution of Massachusetts Childcare Workers

	All Workers	Childcare Industry
Do not Finish High School	5.68%	7.55%
High School Diploma or GED	18.33%	17.96%
Some College	16.82%	25.34%
Associates Degree	7.20%	11.10%
Bachelor's Degree	28.35%	26.77%
Master's or Ph.d	23.63%	11.27%

Source: Calculations using data from the 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Sample.

Although wages are the primary concern for childcare workers, the lack of comprehensive benefits in the industry is also an issue (Lucas 2020). When present, benefits—including health care, paid time off, and retirement plans—have also been shown to retain early educators in the field (Holochwost et al., 2009; Stearns et al., 2014). Across the nation, while 52.2 percent of all workers have employer-sponsored health coverage, only 20.7 percent of childcare workers do.^{xxxi} Retirement has also been and remains a top concern for early educators, with one study demonstrating that 80 percent of center-based early educators consistently worried about their ability to save for retirement, in both 1989 and 2014 (Whitebook et al., 2014). Yet retirement benefits are hard to prioritize when faced with the need to first earn a living wage (Lucas 2023).

Finally, we cannot overlook the long history of racial injustice that leads childcare—highly demanded and demanding work—to be deeply undervalued and undercompensated. The earliest forms of childcare provided by a non-family member stem back to slavery when Black women were not just nannies but also wet nurses to White women’s children. Even today, women of color make up 17.8 percent of the workforce overall but 40.9 percent of the childcare workforce nationally.^{xxxii} In Massachusetts, Table 10 shows that childcare workers are more diverse than the overall workforce with a higher share of workers who identify as Black, Hispanic, and multi-race.

Table 10. Racial and Ethnic Distribution of Massachusetts Childcare Workers

	All Workers	Childcare Industry
White	80.0%	76.1%
Black/ African American	5.3%	7.9%
Hispanic	8.2%	14.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.2%	0.23%
Asian	7.2%	4.8%
2+ Races or Other	7.3%	11.0%

Source: Calculations using data from the 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Sample.

E. Other Aspects of Job Quality in the Childcare Industry

Although wages and benefits are top of mind for most employees, better compensation alone is not enough to turn low-quality jobs into high-quality jobs. Yet often federal funding is only focused on raising wages, or sometimes improving benefits. Moreover, many current employment benefit strategies were created by and for middle- and upper-wage employees, and therefore, overlook important perspectives and experiences of lower-wage employees producing a cycle of vacant positions, turnover and absenteeism. These include aspects of job quality that correspond to JQBI pillars such as scheduling, career ladders, and supportive environment. For example, the Cincinnati Women's Bureau has created an Employer Toolkit with over 60 workplace policies that can help support, stabilize and retain lower-wage employees.^{xxxiii} Many of these policies

and practices reflect the lived experiences of JVS Boston clients to overcome employment barriers such as lack of transportation or childcare.

It's hard to imagine an industry where the need to address a more holistic concept of job quality is more critical than in the childcare sector. Childcare labor is physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing work that lays the foundation of human capital for our children while also serving to maintain a sufficient workforce to the broader economy. Thus, there is not only a strong moral obligation but also a strong business case for attracting and retaining childcare workers through higher wages, better benefits, flexible scheduling, access to career ladders, and an overall supportive environment. In the following sections we assess how the JQBI has contributed to improving job quality across these five pillars—from the perspective of both JVS Boston employer partners and client employees.

V. Qualitative Analysis of JVS Boston JQBI by Job Pillar

The JQBI is one of the few tools that employers can use to benchmark the quality of their jobs against the overall labor market as well as their industry peers across aspects that are highly visible (e.g., wages and benefits) as well as those that are more hidden (e.g., scheduling, career ladders, supportive environment) to prospective job seekers. The goal of the JQBI is to provide employers with specific areas for improvements that can be acted upon in small ways that have immediate impact. In this section we triangulate the themes identified from our employer and employee interviews to assess the degree to which the JQBI was used by employers to identify gaps in job quality, what was done to address those gaps, and how these changes were experienced by employees.

A. Wages

Employers generally felt that the JQBI helped document and make visible what was already known about company wage levels relative to the industry, and this perception was strongly consistent across all types of employers—big and small, non-profit versus for-profit, stand-alone versus part of a chain. Many of the managers that we spoke with – whether they directed individual locations or oversaw the human resources for the entire organization – used the JQBI survey results to advocate to their leadership – individual owners, corporate leadership, or non-profit boards – for wage and benefit increases.

“I wanted more data. I wanted us to be able to compare how we did compare to other centers... And [the survey] helped me in going to the board. We have gotten raises, and we have a promise of more” – Manager at a non-profit childcare center.

“It was one of the, one of the data tools that we used to get our wage adjustment, um, pushed through. So it was, it was very, it was an integral piece of data.” - Director at for-profit childcare company.

“I remember talking to them that we needed to raise our wages, which is interesting cuz my perception is that we're on the higher end, um, in the, in this area... We're, we're definitely on the higher end, but we raised it, we raised them...” - Senior director, non-profit childcare center.

However, the resources used to pay childcare employees higher wages came from both permanent as well as temporary sources. First, many childcare centers raised tuition.

“[We] increased [wages] pretty significantly. Um, and unfortunately the only way to do that because we're a private organization is to up fees for parents.” - Childcare center owner.

“We increased salary. We have, because we have increased tuition, we rely solely on tuition.” - Founder, private for-profit childcare center.

Second, governmental support – from the federal government, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as Boston and other cities – has made salary increases possible and will likely determine whether they are sustainable:

“The state has been giving these C3 grants we've used, yeah, we've used a hundred percent of that to improve

teacher salaries” – Manager at a non-profit childcare center.

Since it was unclear – at least at the time that we talked to employers – whether one or more of the governmental streams of support will continue, several employers had opted to give temporary bonuses in lieu of more permanent wage increases:

“[The grants] helped us with the bonuses. Um, just knowing that, cuz it's been hard to, to do anything that, you know, is permanent or long term. I think it's helped us a, you know, a little bit because it, it gave us a little bit of a cushion to say like, let's, you know, [keep] higher earning teachers for as long as we can hold onto them while this money is coming through” - Manager at a non-profit childcare center.

“Thanks to ARPA money, we've been able to do like recognition bonuses and thank you bonuses” – Executive at a non-profit childcare center.

No matter how employers were able to raise wages, these increases were a primary factor for employees in deciding whether to change employers or leave the childcare industry all together. The industry experienced massive turnover during COVID and wages were top of mind:

“...early childhood educators, like there's, there's a shortage, there's high turnover. They jump from one center to the next to, to make a dollar more...” - Board member at a non-profit center

“So, what we saw post covid or post 2020 and 2021 was like a massive amount of people were like, it's not

worth it for, you know, 15 or 16 bucks an hour. It's just like, it's not worth it. So, they left to go to other careers. So, then you have 40 percent less people in the workforce. And so now you're trying to attract people from outside or people who are graduating high school, graduating tech programs and associate degree programs.” -Senior manager that oversees hiring at a large childcare company

In addition, the market competition for childcare assistant teachers, teachers, and lead teachers extends beyond the childcare industry itself. As indicated by both interviews with clients and employers, employees leave childcare organizations for positions with public school systems, private nanny positions, and other opportunities in addition to going to work for other childcare centers:

“I lost a toddler teacher who's now a para in the Boston Public School. I lost an excellent preschool teacher who's now a para in the Boston Public Schools. She came back this summer, <laugh> to work for us again, uh, in our after school. And she's wonderful, but I can't hire her because she makes more money and has better benefits there” – Mid-level manager at a non-profit childcare center.

“But we've lost a lot of um, uh, teachers to nannying, so nannying and, um, public schools because the hours are better, the benefits are better, the pay is probably similar or maybe a little bit more, but they also have the summers off, vacations, all that stuff” – Manager at one location of a multi-center corporation.

As a result, these wage increases appear to have paid off in terms of retention.

“Less turnover for sure. Like we're, we're holding onto our teachers, um, more significantly than we have in the past.” - Executive at a private, non-profit childcare center.

“...we are not spending on advertising looking for teachers as much as we used to because the teachers are staying.” - Founder, private for-profit childcare center company.

“We're seeing less of the two-job thing.” Manager at one location of a multi-center company.

“...some of our teachers received raises that were so significant that they cried and that they were able to quit their second jobs.” - Executive at a non-profit childcare center.

Among employees, largely a low-income and potentially vulnerable population, the importance of wages was clear. All the JVS Boston clients we talked to were female and most were immigrant mothers for whom English is not their first language. And although wages have been increasing, it doesn't look like they are entirely meeting employee's needs for a living wage just yet.

“I arrived in America just before the pandemic... with my daughter, seven months old in my arm.” -Samantha

“I really don't care about benefits at all. I'm trying to get in the position that I can support, be stable. That's my main mission right now. The benefits are good. You need a job with the benefits, but I'm not really focused on

that. I'm trying to get stable.” – Virginia

“It's going to be 18... It's definitely lower than what I expected.” -Liza

“The payment was just a little bit higher than the minimal was \$17 when I start as an assistant.”
-Samantha

“It's lower than I expected, but it's not bad. It's \$19. It starts off at \$17 and then you get a raise after your three months.” -Allison

In addition, wage increases are often tied to earning additional certifications rather than purely tenure or job experience.

“The starting salary is \$16.50 for an assistant teacher, and then once you're certified you get a dollar more. So I was getting paid \$17.50. And then at the end of the year, so last December, everyone got raises. I believe I got \$2 and 40 cents. I know that I'm under \$19.50 though.” -Danielle

“So it was tied to the certification. Not everybody gets a raise after three months.” -Allison

“They told me \$16.15 when I started... When I received the certificate to a teacher...? They [gave] me \$20 [per] hour.” -Mary

In summary, employers used the information from the JQBI to advocate for higher wages, some from temporary sources (e.g., governmental support) and others from more permanent sources (e.g., tuition increases). Although wages did increase, they often still did not reach the level of what would be considered a living wage, and often these

wages increases were still tied to gaining additional certifications rather than on-the-job experience. As a result, wages continued to be an important factor in why employees chose to leave the industry, often for better paying jobs in public schools or as nannies.

B. Benefits

Benefits were a close second to wages when it came to using the information from the JQBI to improve job quality. Employers seemed less aware of how they compared to their peers in terms of what benefits were offered as well as the generosity of those benefits. As a result, they made important changes in response to what they learned from JVS Boston through the JQBI process.

“...that was because part of it was because the survey you guys shared with me, with us, um, in that survey, we were like number seven, I believe, as far as benefits that we were providing to the teachers. So we started improving in different areas.” - Owner of a for-profit childcare center.

“We didn't have any insurance for anybody here. So we added, and I believe this is year and a half or so, uh, all the insurances. We wanna make sure that the teachers have, uh, access to dental, access to disability.” - Owner of a for-profit childcare center.

“We've actually made our benefits richer.” - Manager at private, non-profit childcare center.

“We have a 403-B with a match that the company contribution has increased from 1 percent to 2

percent” – Manager at one location of a multi-center company.

And these changes were not limited to just medical and dental insurance. Employers also expanded their offerings to try and address some of the barriers that the childcare workforce faces such as mental health, transportation, and English as a second language.

“...employee assistance program that I would say after health and dental is the best thing we invest in for our people.” - Manager at private, non-profit childcare center.

“...we offer 50% off of um, like commuter fees just to alleviate some of the burden of commuting.” - Executive at a private, non-profit childcare center.

“we're thinking about things like a transportation stipend, you know, for a, a Charlie card or whatever.” - Board member at a non-profit center.

“So we paying an English class, uh, we're playing an English teacher for the teachers. Uh, this is like \$150, \$200 a week for all the teachers.” - Founder, private, for-profit childcare center.

One of the biggest changes has been the expansion of childcare benefits for childcare workers themselves due in part to the state loosening some of the restrictions on state vouchers, although ECE eligibility requirements in terms of income and hours worked can limit access.

“Massachusetts decided to let all the teachers have state vouchers under our license numbers saying that they work in job care. So that's been really helpful for them because some of them used to pay for, so that was a huge help.” - Director of for-profit childcare center with multiple locations.

“If you are a teacher, you can get a 25%, um, discount for childcare for two years.” - Director at private, non-profit childcare center.

Several employees said that they took childcare positions in part because their employer offered an employee discount on childcare tuition, which also meant their children would be safely cared for nearby:

“They offered me tuition 75% to my daughter discount.” –Samantha.

“My baby would go to, because the daycare I worked at, he also went to that daycare.” –Virginia.

Although this is great progress, some key benefits are either limited or still missing for childcare workers, most notably retirement savings plans—with some emerging exceptions.

“You get healthcare benefits, but I stick to my own. It's very limited. They don't have a 401 K or anything like that.” -Allison

“I have MassHealth now. I actually don't understand exactly how it works, so I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to stay in Mass Health next year.” –Samantha

“I also need to be there for a whole year before starting receiving the benefits.” -Samantha

One other key benefit that is sometimes overlooked is paid time off (PTO). For the childcare workers who need to work in-person, this is a key component of job quality, especially around the holidays.

“40 hours vacation and 40 hours sick time.” -Mary

“I only concerned about I have long holidays...” -June

“We do have 11 days for Christmas to... New Year.” -Sally

Some employers have responded to these concerns and expanded PTO. Mostly notably the week between Christmas and New Year's when many families who use childcare are also off.

“The vacation time has gone up from one week, the first year to two weeks.” - Director at private, non-profit childcare center.

“We added more time off and to the point where we decide to close between the week of Christmas and New Year's and all employees get that as a fully paid however long it ends up being.” - Director at for-profit childcare company.

In summary, the JQBI was particularly informative for employers when it came to benefits, leading to meaningful changes in medical and dental insurance in particular. In addition, paid time off and discounted onsite childcare was an important benefit expansion

that enabled workers to save time and money while giving them peace of mind. Although many employers had also made efforts to provide benefits addressing mental health, transportation, and language barriers, few were able to offer retirement.

C. Scheduling

Paid time off is one thing, being able to access it is another. Like many in-person service sector jobs, scheduling is an important part of job quality, but especially for childcare workers, many of whom also have their own children to care for at home.

In general, employers seemed fairly confident that they had the right policies in place for employee schedule, with the caveat that the industry is part of the critical infrastructure that enables other parents to get to work and so cannot be as flexible as other jobs.

“I remember there being a question, I think it was around scheduling and, and what it resulted to be was basically it looked like we didn't give our staff enough time off or, or, but, but because we're year-round, because, you know, it, it was, it was apples to oranges with other organizations.” - Manager at private, non-profit childcare center.

“Our people have the schedule for the whole year and if they need a change, if they come to us and request a change, we're usually able to accommodate. But it's not, we do not work on the model where every week you have a different schedule and there's no planning in advance.” - Director at non-profit childcare center

“They have a set schedule. If they need to change, then they usually just change with their coworkers. If they have an afternoon appointment, then they'll just swap or vice versa.” - Director at a for-profit childcare center.

However, scheduling is one area where we noted that employees lived experiences started to diverge from what managers thought was happening on the ground. Scheduling for entry level workers comes down to consistent scheduling (so people can plan their lives around work and arrange for dependent care) and flexibility (being able to make changes to one's schedule when needed for doctor's appts).

“...so it's only me and my baby, my household right now. So, I have to juggle my own schedule.” -Allison

Scheduling is also a factor for clients with school-age children. One client, Virginia, is considering going back to food service because it would allow her to “be home before three o'clock” when her children get off from school.

Although it was true that many childcare workers had stable schedules, not everyone did, and not everyone got paid breaks. It was also the case that at least two weeks' notice was required for any day off which could make it difficult to address their own childcare constraints.

“And the director was inflexible. She decide to change my schedule week to week every 15 days or something like that. I thought it was unfair.” - Samantha

“We don't get paid breaks even though it's the hour. We have that

whole hour off, we have to sign out. So we don't really get the full 40 hours neither. We're working 40 hours, but we don't get paid for an hour.” - Allison

“We have to request a month in advance for a week off and at least two weeks for a day off. And we usually just have to look at the calendar and make sure that there'll be enough teachers here or we have to work together to do stuff like that.” - Danielle

In summary, the JQBI was useful in highlighting the need for more consistent, yet flexible schedules. However, simply having reasonable scheduling policies on the books proved to be insufficient for ensuring fair and equitable scheduling practices across employees.

D. Supportive Environment

Among the five pillars, one of the most under-rated areas of job quality is providing a supportive environment for workers. This could involve tangible things that require resources such as investing in training or improving facilities by updating classrooms or providing a breakroom. However, a supportive environment can also involve intangible actions that require changing practices such as frequent feedback, improving communication, and adopting DEIB best practices to ensure that employees feel like they are seen, heard, and able to bring their full selves to work.

Most of the employers that we talked to seemed to focus on those tangible things like trainings, intermittent recognition for tenure, or annual teacher appreciation days.

“...whoever finishes their online trainings for professional

development will see a bonus in their checks. And then they all started getting on there.” - Executive, private for-profit childcare center.

“There is a three-year anniversary gift of money, um, and flowers and recognition. There's a 10 year, there is a 20 year, and we do have people who've been here 20 years, um, recognition award.” - Director at private, non-profit childcare center.

“...we just had a huge teacher appreciation week and like every day was a different, like one day it was breakfast for everyone. One day was a snack bar, one day was lunch and mocktails one day was, um, cake and a gift. We gave everyone a long sleeve shirt. And then the last day was, um, a party. We had a, like an evening party after we closed with a DJ and drinks and food and all of that stuff.” - Executive at non-profit childcare center.

Some employers do focus on the intangible day to day actions like feedback, communication, and support but maybe not with the level of intentionality that they would hope to achieve:

“so the state requires us to do a observations of each employee, um, every two months. So that's one way that we do. Um, and the, the directors usually meet with the, the staff member and offer them feedback..,” - Director, multi-location, for-profit company.

“when they start with us, they have an orientation. We go over the job description, our employment policies and things that an initial adjustment

period review early on and then formal performance appraisal at least annually. And I'll be honest, as you can hear the wavering in my voice, I don't love the tool that we're using. And what we did last year was did sort of more of a narrative form." - Director at non-profit childcare center.

"we have a staff survey that honestly had not been distributed like with fidelity over the years, but we did conduct one this year. Um, and then our leadership team reviews it and makes goals based on it. Um, I think we have a really, um, approachable program leadership team. So my hope is like in meetings or um, one-on-one that teachers are coming to share whatever ideas they have, feedback criticisms with their supervisors, uh, rarely, but it has happened. People will come to me directly with ideas or issues." - Executive at non-profit childcare center.

"And so that was something that as we got started on this, obviously we wanted a loving childcare and facility for our children. It's a really great physical space, but one of the other feature, one of the other goals and values that we have in mind is that we wanna provide a competitive and supportive, um, environment for these women." - Board member at a non-profit center

Several of the employers that we interviewed noted that the individuals applying to become childcare teachers in the post-pandemic era often needed additional supports that differed markedly from those employed prior to 2020.

"It's a lot of the, with these recent high school grads, it's a lot of, um, life skills that we're having to teach. We never had, this was, this is all new for us. What is health insurance and how does that work? What is, um, your responsibility for thinking ahead about your schedule? ... So, it's a lot of that kind of support that is new for us. Totally new." - Senior director, non-profit childcare center.

Similar to scheduling, employees often wanted more from their employers in terms of providing a supportive environment through either encouragement or resolving conflicts with their peers.

"...as far as our director and we just don't feel like she cares about us. Even though we've been working really hard. We've been understaffed for a year, and so we take on a lot and I feel like sometimes we're just like, we just want to feel appreciated. And so for teacher appreciation, it was kind of like a bust, but we do it for the kids." - Danielle

"I had a personal problem with a coworker and at that time I tried to solve in many ways because the company was good, but the director in my view didn't help me." - Samantha

"I wish they would do more of recognizing the teachers that are doing what needs to be done and the teachers that really want to be here to teach rather than just throwing everybody in. And you'll see that most teachers are not really, this is not where they want to be. It makes it a little bit challenging for other teachers who are really passionate because it's like we take up all of the slack for the

teachers who don't really care. So I would like for them to recognize more, be careful of who they're hiring and stuff to be in classrooms with as teachers as far as the assistances and the people who are here to help us with the children.” –Allison

Some employees mentioned a lack of adult interaction on the job and expressed a simple desire for more human connection.

“[They] say good job. That's it.” - Mary

“Maybe more connection, more with the teachers because sometimes we explain something, sometimes they explain something too, but it's not connected with their teachers. It's not feel like the family. Everybody stay in her room, stay with kids with classes.” -Mary

In summary, the JQBI served to signal the importance of creating a supportive environment, although doing so is not as straightforward as improving other more tangible measures of job quality such as wages or benefits. Post-pandemic, employees have a greater need of supports from their employers, especially those that are new to the industry or the workplace in general. At the same time they desire to work in places that they consider to be genuinely supportive on a daily basis rather than just through an annual or one-off recognition. As such, employers should focus on job quality beyond the tangible elements and think about safety at work, creating a sense of belonging, recognizing the importance of weekly supervision and/or mentoring.

E. Career Ladders

One of the main drawbacks to the childcare industry is the very uneven career ladder which typically requires employees to obtain additional formal schooling and credentials to advance.

This can be a barrier for many childcare workers who are also juggling their own family responsibilities in addition to navigating transportation and language barriers. But there are few opportunities to advance from an entry level teaching assistant to lead teacher or director without these additional state recognized certifications.

Providing a career ladder is just as much about the job seeker being given opportunities to grow within their job, as the employer communicating the path to the employee and the steps required to proceed to the next level role. Most employers that we talked to recognized this limited career ladder and tried to support their workers in obtaining additional education that would allow them to move up to a position with more responsibility and better pay.

“We'll give you six months to a year to get certified. We'll pay for that class. Your child growth and development. You're gonna get the time hours you need on the job, you're good to go.” - Manager at a private, non-profit childcare center.

“So we are constantly trying to get everybody to just keep signing up for classes so everyone can be certified.” - Director, private for-profit childcare center.

“I think it's 12 credits to become lead, but on top of lead, you need 36

months working experience as a teacher. So it takes them three years to be a lead teacher. If they keep at it, they usually don't. They usually take a break, take a class, take a break, take a class, and we're trying to encourage, take a class every year or take a few classes, every one, every semester or something, because I'm always willing to help them when they take a class.” - Director of for-profit childcare center with multiple locations.

Other employers have started thinking more creatively how to provide opportunities that could bridge those gaps between one credentialed position to the next. This seemed especially important to be able to retain teachers in the classroom rather than just providing them with a pathway that would take them into administration.

“I think some of the questions were things that we hadn't really thought through, like do, do, you know, even thinking about like our career ladders or how, you know, whether staff have access to one-on-one, um, coaching or you know, some of those pieces that we had to kind of sit down and say like, how do we have that structured or what do we offer?” - Board member at a non-profit center

“[We] have something called like a tc, it's a team coordinator, sort of a lead teacher, but it's not as though you're the lead teacher and the boss of your colleagues... You are sort of the communications person.”- Manager at a private, non-profit childcare center.

“We have invested heavily in professional development last year

starting, um, we closed for five full days a year. But then on the months where we're not closed for a full day, we close early at three o'clock and we do monthly professional development from 3:30 to 5:30.” - Executive at non-profit childcare center.

“Our directors, um, usually kind of identify that staff that we feel like, oh, she, she may be getting close to being ready to be a director. So, they kind of do their own internal like, um, training them for like when the director isn't going to be there, they're on vacation, so they'll be the person in charge.” - Director, multi-location, for-profit company.

“The real need is for people in the classrooms. So what, what we find really challenging is this thought of like, I need to be on a ladder and I need to move up into out of the classroom. And that we were hearing that a lot.” - Director of non-profit childcare center.

Although many employees expressed a desire to move up, either within the classroom or into administration, most didn't think they could advance at their current employer. Others found the idea of continuing their current position and attending classes daunting.

“I have to just advance because the job doesn't really help with that, but it's fine because I've been doing it, thankfully. Yeah, I've been taking my courses and stuff.”- Allison

“So I'm a student now going for my associates in early childhood education, and that's kind of like I have to juggle that. So if I'm stuck at

work, it's like, and I have to go home and do homework or attend a class. It's kind of challenging, but they don't take that into consideration, which is okay because a job is a job, but this is my career, so I take it very seriously.”
- Allison

“So, I do want to stay in the classroom, but I can also move up and become a director where I'm overlooking the teachers, making sure that they're doing their jobs too. So, I would love to advance in this career if I can move to director. There's not much growth where I'm at unless you become a manager director.” - Allison

“I don't know if this is at every center, but I know my center, we have monthly trainings and trainings that we have to do every year. And so I'm always learning, but when it comes to moving up my title, I would have to go to school for it.” - Danielle

“I check on the Bunker Hill website, but I cannot work full-time at the early childhood education and then full-time or part-time for the school. They don't have that schedule. It's like Monday to Friday. If I work for early childhood education, early child, but I cannot go to school because I don't have a time.” - Sally

Although not always recognized as such, childcare is complex work that involves time

management, lesson planning, classroom management, and de-escalation skills that go far beyond what the state requires. One employer summed it up this way:

“one thing that I need, what one thing I believe that this field needs is like a complete rebrand and we need like a public campaign with like celebrities and stuff to talk about how important early education is and how admirable it is to be an early educator to help like change the public perception of our early educators and make it seem respectable and like a desirable field to go in. Because right now that's not the case.” - Executive at a private, non-profit childcare center.

In summary, the JQBI helped employers to be more mindful of finding creative ways to provide small career steps, if not actual ladders. Some employers were able to create distinctive positions that embodied one or two additional skills but were still in compliance with state regulations. This could be particularly helpful to share as a best practice across employers since many employees would like to move up but face substantial barriers to earning the formal credentials that would allow them to do so under the typical childcare career ladder.

Finally, sharing proven strategies could be helpful to remove barriers for employers who may feel that any deviation from the list of EEC approved tasks could jeopardize their state license.

VI. Assessing the JQBI Implementation Process

During the course of our interviews, we surfaced several key insights for improving the JQBI tool and process. Some of these included how to refine the tool to make better use of the available data to improve job quality. Others focused on how to expand the use of the JQBI over time and across other job quality dimensions. Finally, some of these suggestions were really remaining challenges faced by the industry rather than things that could be addressed by the JQBI tool.

A. Using JQBI Data to Improve Job Quality

The primary strength of the JQBI lies in the flexibility of the tool to measure job quality across multiple dimensions as well as the strong relationships that JVS Boston has with its employer partners to be credible in providing such information. By measuring job quality across the five key pillars, employers have the opportunity to see their rank across each category and understand where to focus their efforts in terms of priority setting. Overall, our interviews with employers indicated that they used the information from the JQBI survey as both confirmation of what they already suspected was true of their ranking within the industry as well as justification for advocating for improving job quality to their firm's senior leadership.

"I knew, I knew what the goals were and that was basically we need a baseline to find out where we're at. Um, it did that certainly did that." - Director at for-profit childcare company.

"I had an idea. I had an idea, but the, uh, survey made the idea concrete,

like, you are in the right track. You need to work on this" – Childcare center founder.

"...taking this survey really expounded upon the things that we sort of already knew." - Director at for-profit childcare company.

"I feel like it's always helpful to get a sense of where we land and what the typical trends are within the field." - Director, non-profit childcare center.

Moreover, the strong relationships that JVS Boston has with their employer partners meant that this information is being collected and delivered by a trusted source, and more importantly one that has "skin in the game" as a partner in training and placing potential employees. The employers we interviewed universally expressed overwhelmingly positive experiences with JVS Boston and viewed their job candidates as well-prepared for the interview and well-qualified for the teacher assistant position.

"I can tell somebody has prepped them to say, you're going to be asked, tell me about your yourself. You're gonna be asked about your employment history, why you wanna work in an early childhood setting. So they, for the most part, I think are, you know, they're prepared for those." – Executive at a non-profit center.

"the people that are candidates are in the class that they need to become certified in early ed. So they're already screened in for like, wanting to be in the field and on track to becoming certified. Cuz oftentimes when we're recruiting externally, no

one's taking the class already. And sometimes it's a hard sell to get someone involved in the class because they're like, eh, I'll just make \$18 an hour and I'm good with that. I don't wanna take the class. Um, but we need people to be certified because it's better for the kids, but it's also allows us to like, have a lot more flexibility in our staffing and just have enough certified humans here based on regulations. So the fact that they're 'n track already to become certified is like gold." - Executive at a private, non-profit childcare center.

"they also support them cuz in early education we're accustomed to working or attempting to work with people who might need some more support, but they don't always have it so that they don't stay on track or it just isn't, it's just nice to know that there's, um, someone working with them to help them succeed cuz they're more likely to succeed with additional support." - Executive at a private, non-profit childcare center.

Another strength of the JQBI was the simple power of information to motivate action intrinsically without the need for other external consequences. Employer partners largely knew which areas they would likely score lower, but they did not always know where they ranked relative to their peers. Yet it turns out that learning how they stacked up against their competitors motivated them to make changes to their job quality, likely motivated in part, by tight labor market and fierce competition among childcare employers for workers. Moreover, the JQBI provided directors and managers with the data they needed to motivate, advocate, or justify improvements to job quality with their boards and/or senior leadership. All this was

achieved with simple factual reporting and without penalties that might impact JVS Boston client placements or interactions:

"...[the survey] is all confirming to me every time I ask anybody, I come out with the, you know, with the, the news, Hey, raise the benefits, raise the pay." - Senior director, non-profit childcare center.

"I wanted more data. I wanted us to be able to compare how we did compare to other centers... to go to the board." - Director at private, non-profit childcare center.

B. Expanding the Use of the JQBI Tool

One key differentiator of the JQBI is the ability of companies to take the survey more than once and compare their scores over time to engage in a continuous and virtuous cycle of improvement. For example, three of the employers that we interviewed had taken the JQBI more than once which allowed them to observe changes in their scores over time as they improved various aspects of the quality of their jobs. Two of the three experienced significant increases in their JQBI scores which suggests that the survey accurately captures changes in job quality and can be used by employers as a tool for continuous improvement. Given that these are long-term relationships, JVS Boston might want to be more intentional about suggesting that employers take the survey annually or bi-annually going forward.

"So there was, there was like reassurance that we were on the right track, but there just needed to be some other things that were augmented. And so my manager at the time, and I took it on full force and decided we're

gonna go for a, um, a full scale review of wages across all 39 of our schools to see where, cuz per the results we ranked, I think either three or four or four or four, I can't remember. Um, but it was, it was clear that there needed to be some movement on that. So we took it on and we were able to get a commitment from our leadership and also from the parent company that wage, wage review for us as a company would happen on a yearly basis. And that has, they've stayed true to that.” - Director at for-profit childcare company.

Another potential use of the JQBI is the ability to disaggregate the data for more “apples to apples” comparisons and also provide more detailed reporting as the tool is used by more employers. Childcare providers come in many shapes and sizes and many employers wanted to know how they stacked up to firms who were similar in terms of size, non-profit status, and program type (e.g., dual language). In addition, employer partners wanted more detailed reporting, question by question, to understand the nuance behind their rankings and also what the “ideal” employer would look like.

“...it would be helpful to see kind of like what is, uh, a good score, right? So like what, what does that mean? Cuz one of the things that we looked at as we're looking at the bar graphs, right? So the benchmark that we're striving for is 75, but the average score is in the fifties... what is this big discrepancy between the 50, the average and the 75?” - Board member at a non-profit center

“...the way we looked at that question was different because of the way our organization is set up or because

of the way we have to do staffing...” - Manager at a private, non-profit childcare center.

Employers might also want to expand their use the JQBI reports not only to assess the need for policy changes on the part of the organization but also to motivate the need for changes in practice on the part of supervisors. While the managers and directors that we interviewed all appreciate the need to improve job quality with their firm as well as the broader industry, employees noted that this was not always carried through to the adoption of supportive practices by their direct supervisors. It's one thing to have a policy about scheduling or a supportive environment but it's another thing altogether to get supervisor buy-in to implement such changes.

“So, um, every teacher has a supervisor, um, including our classroom assistants, which is what our JVS friends come as start as. Um, and then a lot of what they learn is like, unfortunately it's just the nature of the beast on the ground, like in the classroom from their, the teachers that they're supporting. So a lot of it is like through osmosis and following example and supporting like in the moment. And then I believe that our supervisors also provide like a general orientation. Um, I hope that that's the case, but honestly like we always have a 10% vacancy rate here. Mm. So sometimes our supervisor are, are in classrooms acting as teachers themselves. So there really isn't, um, as much time as we would like to be supportive to to staff any staff—JVS or not—when they start.” - Executive at a private, non-profit childcare center.

Finally, there appears to be a desire among employees for opportunities to demonstrate smaller skill growth as part of a less formal career path, but this is not something that is fully captured by the current version of the JQBI survey. Given that JVS Boston is a trusted entity among employees, perhaps there is the opportunity to collect additional data that can be used for further refinements to the JQBI over time can lead to additional insights for employer partners to improve the quality of their jobs along other dimensions. Employees universally expressed feeling supported before, during, and after the hiring process by JVS Boston.

“Yes, so far, I've been fine with receiving help from JVS. They're awesome and I'm very thankful for them” – Allison.

“So, to work at the JVS, that's very, yeah, I mean it is a little bit change my life” – Sally.

The JVS program “was an amazing experience” – Samantha.

C. Remaining Challenges Beyond the Scope of the JQBI

There are several remaining challenges that serve as barriers to raising job quality in the childcare sector, most of which are beyond the current scope of the JQBI.

First, while raising wages in the sector is a high priority, there needs to be a strong commitment on the part of employers to achieve a living wage, and quickly, lest employees face penalties associated with receiving public benefits such as cliff effects. Roughly half of all childcare workers receive public benefits of some form such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program

(CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). When workers on public assistance earn more money, they might cross the eligibility thresholds that qualify them for that necessary assistance, causing an enormous loss of total financial resources. Benefits plateaus occur when families increase their earnings just enough to make up for lost benefits—they're not necessarily worse off, but they're no better off. Thus, any wages increases would need to be large enough to offset any potential loss of public benefits—otherwise many childcare workers will just be treading water.

A second challenge is ensuring that companies can sustain the improvements that they make in job quality, particularly when it comes to wages. For example, most employer partners that raised pay did so using the federal pandemic subsidies—either through bonuses or actual hourly wage rates. As of September 30, 2023, states experienced a steep drop-off in federal childcare investment with 70,000 childcare programs projected to close nationwide, leaving upwards of three million children without access to childcare. The loss of these subsidies is likely to have ripple effects for parents who need to reduce their work hours or leave the labor force, for businesses who will lose valuable employees or experience the impact of their employees' childcare disruptions, and for state economies that will lose tax revenue and jobs in the childcare sector. Without a renewed commitment from the federal government, the Century Foundation projects that 1,809 childcare programs could close leaving roughly 56,000 children without care.^{xxxiv} More than 98 percent of childcare providers in Boston have received money through this program, indicating the need for strong systems change that is fully funded and supported by state and federal budgets.

It's not only wages but also other benefits, like healthcare and retirement, that have been supported by subsidies and will need shoring up. The ability of private sector employers to keep with the rising costs of benefit programs has led to an erosion of the safety net provided by health insurance and 401k plans.

Arrangements where companies can band together through an association to access discounted insurance premiums in bulk could be worth piloting. Childcare workers are a particularly vulnerable population that faces even greater barriers such as illness, housing insecurity, domestic violence, and mental health that are rarely addressed

VII. Conclusion: Looking Forward

A. Summary of Key Findings

It's hard to imagine an industry where the need to address a more holistic concept of job quality is more critical than in the childcare sector. Childcare labor is physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing work that lays the foundation of human capital for our children while also serving to maintain a sufficient workforce to the broader economy.

Our quantitative landscape analysis showed that organized childcare plays an important role in the lives of families as well as the broader economy in four distinct ways:

- First, the childcare industry provides direct employment to many low-wage workers, boosting aggregate consumer spending. Prior to the pandemic in 2019, the industry produced \$1.69 billion in direct revenue and employed nearly 39,100 workers in Massachusetts.
- Second, childcare is a critical piece of infrastructure that allows parents to get to work. Even prior to the pandemic, American businesses lost an estimated \$12.7 billion annually because of their employees' childcare challenges. Nationally, the cost of lost earnings, productivity, and revenue

due to lack of childcare totaled \$57 billion each year.

- Third, childcare helps reduce inequality across groups by boosting labor force participation, hours worked, and skill development among low-income workers while contributing to economic growth and productivity over the long-term. Yet according to state data, more than 16,000 income-eligible children were on waitlists for care in Massachusetts as of February 2022.
- Fourth, childcare provides developmentally appropriate activities for children that can help reduce future achievement gaps, thereby indirectly stimulating economic growth. The early learning opportunities provided by pre-schools can help reduce achievement gaps between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers that emerge well before kindergarten and largely persist throughout K–12

During the COVID-19 pandemic when many daycares were shut down, the childcare industry suffered large revenue losses, particularly in Massachusetts where COVID restrictions were more stringent and in place for longer.

- As a result, many childcare providers closed their doors causing the number of licensed childcare centers to drop from 2,093 in 2019 to 2,060 in 2020. employment in the state's childcare sector is still below that which would have occurred if it had continued its pre-pandemic upward trajectory prior to the pandemic.
- Employers are posting a record number of open childcare positions, yet employment remains below the projected demand based on the prior upward trajectory pre-COVID. For example, the Massachusetts companies that we interviewed have been posting two to four times as many job postings each year post-pandemic compared to 2019.
- One factor that can affect the time it takes to hire is the types of skill requirements that employers put on their job postings. Excessive requirements for education and/or experience can create barriers to employment for entry-level workers. In addition, professional growth for incumbent workers can be stymied by the need for completion of college level classes to advance in their careers.

Raising wages is easier said than done in the childcare industry where the profit margins are thin due to the highly regulated and labor-intensive nature of the job. And although wages are the primary concern for childcare workers, the lack of comprehensive benefits in the industry is also an issue.

- Childcare voucher reimbursement rates often fail to account for a number of factors, such as revenue

instability due to families dipping into and out of care, which also serves the keep salaries low for childcare workers.

- The American Rescue Plan Act provided \$39 billion in emergency funding to stabilize the existing childcare sector, allowing providers to meaningfully raise wages for the first time in years.
- Yet childcare workers are still half as likely as the rest of the American workforce to have employer-sponsored health coverage, and 80 percent of center-based early educators consistently worried about their ability to save for retirement.

Although wages and benefits are top of mind for most employees, better compensation alone is not enough to turn low-quality jobs into high-quality jobs, we cannot overlook the long history of racial injustice that leads childcare—highly demanded and demanding work—to be deeply undervalued and undercompensated.

- Women of color make up 17.8 percent of the workforce overall but 40.9 percent of the childcare workforce nationally. In Massachusetts, childcare workers are more diverse than the overall workforce with a higher share of workers who identify as Black, Hispanic, and multi-race.
- Yet often federal funding is only focused on raising wages, or sometimes improving benefits, but often overlooking aspects of job quality that contribute to turnover and absenteeism among lower-wage employees such as scheduling, career

ladders, and a supportive job environment.

Thus, there is not only a strong moral obligation but also a strong business case for attracting and retaining childcare workers through higher wages, better benefits, flexible scheduling, access to career ladders, and an overall supportive environment.

Our qualitative interviews with both JVS Boston employer partners and client employees found that the JQBI has contributed to improving job quality across five key pillars:

- Wages: Employers used the JQBI to advocate for higher wages, some from temporary sources (e.g., governmental support) and others from more permanent sources (e.g., tuition increases). Although wages did increase, they often still did not reach the level of what would be considered a living wage, and often these wages increases were still tied to gaining additional certifications rather than on-the-job experience.
- Benefits: The JQBI also led to meaningful changes in medical and dental insurance, paid time off, and discounted onsite childcare. Although many employers had also made efforts to provide benefits addressing mental health, transportation, and language barriers, few were able to offer retirement.
- Scheduling: Although the JQBI highlighted the need for more consistent, yet flexible schedules, simply having reasonable scheduling policies on the books proved to be insufficient for ensuring fair and

equitable scheduling practices across employees.

- Supportive Environment: Employers found the JQBI to be useful in signaling the importance of a supportive environment, although doing so was not as straightforward as improving other more tangible measures of job quality. These include safety at work, creating a sense of belonging, recognizing the importance of weekly supervision and/or mentoring.
- Career Ladders: The JQBI helped employers to be more mindful of finding creative ways to provide small career steps that embodied one or two additional skills but were still in compliance with state regulations. Sharing these innovative best practices could be helpful to remove barriers for employees while empowering employers to make changes without jeopardizing their state license.

B. Recommendations to Improve the Use of the JQBI

Part of the reason why JVS Boston commissioned this research was to learn more about JQBI implementation and how to improve the process going forward. Already, we have identified several opportunities for revising the JQBI that could benefit both JVS Boston employer partners as well as client employees. These include:

1. Provide employers with reports filtered by company size or status (profit vs. non-profit), in addition to reports for all employers with the same job title, so that they have a sharper view of how they compare to

the industry broadly to make more “apples to apples” comparisons.

2. Give employers free detailed reports so they can better understand the nuance behind their rankings in each of the five job quality pillar categories.
3. Continue to encourage more employer partners to take the JQBI and to take it more than once to expand the pool of organizations used for benchmarking and capture improvements over time.
4. Involve supervisors as part of the JQBI process—either as part of the survey or the final reporting—to ensure the information is communicated throughout the organization.
5. Capture the views of JVS Boston employee clients more systematically—either through a separate employee survey or series of interviews—to verify the policies put in place and whether changes to job quality are actually making a meaningful difference for workers.
6. Pair the JQBI with a set of best practices and/or advocacy efforts for improving job quality to provide employers and policy makers with a set of actionable steps.
7. Compare the JQBI results across sectors to determine if there are best practices that can be applied from one industry to another.

C. Additional Assessments of the JQBI’s Economic Impact

While this study was able to provide a glimpse into how the JQBI is working and whether it is having a direct impact on job quality for those employers and employees in participating organizations, we could not make any formal assessment of the tool regarding its causal impacts nor the spillover affects across the industry or the broader economy. For example, employer partners who took the JQBI survey could be those that were already highly motivated to make changes to the quality of their jobs. In that case, the JQBI might be simply providing better information to accompany the actions that companies were likely to take anyway. Future assessments could be designed to better measure both the direct and indirect impacts of the JQBI. For example, JVS Boston could randomly choose which employer partners to invite to take the JQBI survey and then compare the resulting changes in job quality to a control group of employers who were not invited to receive such information. That way JVS Boston would know that it was the JQBI, rather than the strong labor market or state subsidies, that was driving the changes in job quality among their employer partners.

Similarly, the relatively small number of employers and employees that we interviewed did not provide enough information to assess the larger impacts of the JQBI beyond those in our sample. For example, many employers raised wages in response to the information provided by the JQBI which has the potential to affect the wages of other employers in the industry who must now compete with this higher standard.

Similarly, wage increases are likely to increase consumer spending by the affected workers which in turn can have multiplier effects on the local economy in terms of business revenues and employment beyond the childcare sector. In addition, higher

wages may have a meaningful impact on taxable income, and hence revenues, depending on the size of the additional earnings and whether the workers receives the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Finally, the additional earnings may serve to decrease reliance on state public assistance, such as Medicaid, yielding further positive spillovers on the state economy. Future assessments could request state payroll data for all childcare employers and employees to systematically track changes in wages and benefits.

D. The Future Role of the JQBI

The strong labor market coming out of the pandemic has shown to be remarkably persistent, yielding an unprecedented opportunity for JVS Boston and other workforce development intermediaries to motivate employers to make meaningful changes. Turnover is a big concern among employers and those interviewed noted that the general pool of applicants is less qualified as workers have opted out of childcare for better paying positions with strong career ladders in other occupations, most notably in K-12 education.

The employers we interviewed all expressed a deep appreciation for JVS Boston

placement services and found value in the information that the JQBI provided. It seems that there could be an opportunity to expand its use beyond the limited set of JVS Boston employer-partners to also serve as a diagnostic tool used by other private sector employers, workforce development organizations, or even the state. Moreover, coupling the use of the JQBI with professional development for supervisors, strategic planning for organizations, or even state efforts to better prepare early education workers would enhance the impact of the tool beyond simply providing information.

Finally, expanded use of the JQBI is an integral part of JVS Boston's new three-year strategic plan, including using generalized finding to be a better advocate on policies affecting low-income workers. Focusing JVS Boston's JQBI work on employers in sectors in which they train, in addition to childcare, will push employer practice change across Greater Boston. Implementing some of the recommendations coming out of this report will serve to strengthen the JQBI's impacts on job quality for historically marginalized talent and the employers with which the agency partners.

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