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Research · January 2020

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29109.91366

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Child care challenges when parents' work schedules are unpredictable and not 9-to-5

By Laura Sosinsky, Ph.D.

A growing number of working parents do not have predictable weekday work schedules. Shifts can change at the last minute. Many parents work at night, in the early morning, or on the weekend. How do they manage? And what happens with their children?

These issues are getting attention in the media and research, and prompting changes in local and state policies. Philadelphia's new "Fair Work Week" ordinance, which was signed into law on December 20, 2018 and went into effect on January 1, 2020, will require chain retailers and restaurants to raise scheduling standards, including giving workers two-week advance notice of their hourly schedules.

This brief examines the "supply and demand" of child care when young children's parents work nonstandard or unpredictable schedules. How many families need nonstandard- or irregular-hour child care, and why? How many child care providers supply nonstandard- or irregular-hour care, and what are the barriers to expanding this service? What strategies to address this growing challenge have been proposed or tested? The brief covers the national context with a focus on Philadelphia. Then it discusses strategies to address this growing challenge. The national context is covered, with a focus on Philadelphia.

In today's 24/7 economy, many workers' jobs require evening, overnight, or weekend hours, a trend that has been on the rise for years (Enchautegui, Johnson, & Gelatt, 2015; McMenamin, 2007; Presser, 1999). Volatile work schedules are also mushrooming, marked by unpredictable scheduling of shifts, very little advance notice, and fluctuations in the amount and timing of workers' hours from week to week (Crosby & Mendez, 2017; Golden, 2015; Lambert, Fugiel, & Henly, 2014). Employers may require overtime with little advance notice or reduce a worker's hours – and paycheck – when work is slow (Ben-Ishai, Matthews, & Levin-Epstein, 2014). Many workers in these jobs also face rigid scheduling and have little to no control over their work hours (Lambert et al., 2014; Ogden & Morduch, 2017). They are, essentially, expected to be on call. The industries are varied – retail, restaurants, health care, warehousing, security, customer service, transportation – but the shared issue is that many workers do not have predictable 9-to-5 schedules. The phenomenon is so common – the “new normal” (Ben-Ishai et al., 2014, p. 2) - that terms such as “nonstandard” and “nontraditional” hours are no longer applicable (Stoll & Alexander, 2015).

For the sizable number of parents on the night shift or with unpredictable schedules and wages, child care is a major weak point and source of stress and instability (Carrillo, Harknett, Logan, Luhr, & Schneider, 2017; Corser, 2017; Enchautegui, Johnson, & Gelatt, 2015). High-quality child care is critical for children's school readiness (Bradley & Vandell, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), but finding, maintaining, and paying for it is very difficult when parents do not know when and how much they will work (and earn) week to week, or even day to day. Not enough child care providers offer care at night or on irregular schedules (NSECE, 2015). Being on call makes it difficult, if not impossible, for parents to access formal early care and education programs such as child care centers, Head Start, or prekindergarten. Informal arrangements with family and friends are also complicated and can fall through (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008). Policies aimed at improving the supply of high quality child care and easing access and affordability do not often function as intended for families working such schedules (Johnson-Staub, Matthews, & Adams, 2015; Schulman & Blank, 2017).

Improving the situation will take progress in three quarters: **workplace conditions, child care supply, and labor and child care policies.**

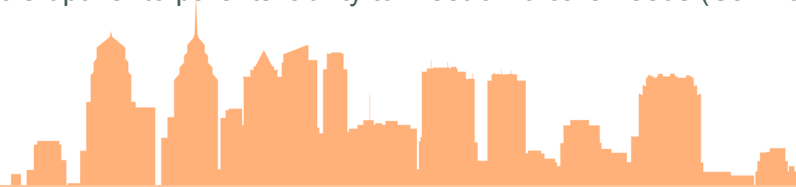
Workplace conditions

Jobs with nonstandard and unpredictable hours: pervasive, increasing, and low-quality

Work schedules are key to job quality, which is important to child and family well-being. A high-quality job offers sufficient wages, raises, and benefits, minimal fluctuations in hours, the ability to request changes in work hours, job security, and some autonomy (Boushey & Mitukiewicz, 2014; Corser, 2017; Golden, 2015; Henrich, 2014; Johnson, Kalil, & Dunifon, 2012). Low-quality jobs are common among early career workers across almost all sectors and types of jobs, according to analyses of work schedule data from a nationally representative survey of workers 26-32 years old (Lambert, Fugiel, & Henly, 2014). Similarly, about 17% of workers of all ages report irregular work schedules; the percentage of workers can range from as low as 9% to as high as 36% depending on industry and pay status (e.g., salaried or hourly; Golden, 2015; see also Henly & Lambert, 2014). Studies find high rates of low-quality jobs within specific industries, such as in retail (Corser, 2017) and the restaurant industry (ROC United, 2016).

When parents' jobs are low quality, children's well-being can suffer across cognitive and academic development, behavior and socio-emotional development, and physical health. Families with such job schedules struggle with unstable home lives and routines. Parents engage less in activities with their children such as book reading and health-promoting behaviors, and parents' own well-being and self-sufficiency is harmed as well. Being on call also closes off other opportunities that could raise a family's income, such as taking a second job or finishing a degree (Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Despite these negative consequences, many families face low-quality jobs characterized by short notice, wide fluctuations in hours, and limited employee control, and their numbers are increasing.

Parents with stable schedules, even if they are at night or on weekends, can at least plan ahead to care for their children. Unpredictable and unstable schedules are distinct even from nonstandard schedules, and are "especially disruptive" to parents' ability to meet child care needs (Carrillo et al., 2017, p. 437).



A recent survey captures data in **Philadelphia** and across the country from retail and food service workers (Schneider & Harkness, 2016; 2018),¹ a sector which has many hourly workers in nonstandard or unpredictable schedules. In the Philadelphia metropolitan area, which has nearly 100,000 workers in this sector, workers report that their work schedule:

- Does not provide enough flexibility to handle family needs: 53%
- Causes extra stress for their family: 31% "always or often", 73% "always, often, or sometimes"
- Makes it hard to meet caregiving responsibilities: 44% "always or often", 72% "always, often, or sometimes"

Working parents at all income levels are affected by fluctuating or non-standard work hours. High-compensation fields like doctors, lawyers, investment bankers, and highly-paid sales jobs often come with grueling or unpredictable hours (Tuttle & Davidson, 2014). However, highly-paid parents have the income needed to hire in-home care or to pay to maintain a slot in a child care center even if they don't use all of the days and hours they have purchased. Parents in these roles may have somewhat more control over their schedule than parents in low-income or hourly wage jobs, or may at least have paid time off without concern about job protection. That said, parents in such professions do also face the issue of low supply of formal, regulated out-of-home care during non-traditional hours.

¹ Data on workers with nonstandard or unpredictable schedules are hard to come by for individual cities or states and even at the national level. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics last collected such data in 2004, and the national data cannot be broken down to the level of individual cities.

Schneider and Harknett (2016) collected survey data from over 36,000 workers employed at large chain retailers and food service establishments across the country between August 2016 and June 2017. Workers between 18 and 50 years of age who work at one of eight of the largest 13 retail companies (excluding Amazon.com and Apple as they are primarily online sales companies), were recruited via online Facebook advertisements. Surveys included sections on job characteristics, work schedules, demographics, economic stability, health, and, for those with children in the home, parenting and child outcomes. A 2018 research brief focuses on a subsample of 687 workers in the Philadelphia metropolitan area (Schneider & Harknett, 2018).

Child development and family well-being when parents' work schedules are nonstandard and volatile and round-the-clock

Parents' nonstandard or irregular work schedules are associated with less positive child health and developmental outcomes and greater family stress and strain.

Child development. Children who experience nonstandard parent work schedules have lower scores on measures of children's cognitive performance, verbal comprehension and expressive language skills, and mathematical progress (Li et al., 2014; Han, 2006). Children whose parents work irregular shifts display more irregular mood rhythms and negative moods (Gassman-Pines, 2011; Sevon et al., 2017) and more internalizing problems, more behavior problems, and lower rates of prosocial behaviors (Han, 2008; Ronka et al. 2017).

Child health. Parents' nontraditional work schedules are also associated with more negative children's health outcomes and fewer health-promoting behaviors. For example, higher rates of overweight and obesity and steeper body-mass index trajectories (Miller & Chang, 2015; Morrissey, Dunifon, & Kalil, 2012; Zilanawala, Abell, Bell, Webb, & Lacey, 2017) and lower breastfeeding rates (Zilanawala et al., 2017) are correlated with parents working nonstandard shifts. The impracticality of planning meals, cooking from scratch with fresh produce, and sitting and eating together when work schedules change at the last minute means that parents who frequently experienced these changes must make trade-offs and compromises that disrupt young children's meal routines and nutrition (Argawal et al., 2018; Illinois Action for Children, 2013).

Family well-being and parenting. Parents' work schedules may also increase parents' stress and work-family conflict (Golden & Kim, 2017; Henly & Lambert, 2014; Illinois Action for Children, 2013; Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999; Schneider & Harknett, 2018). Such strains are known to contribute to reduced parental sensitivity, less positive parent-child interactions, and less involved parenting (Gassman-Pines, 2011; Grzywacz, Daniel, Tucker, Walls, & Leerkes, 2011) or increased parental depressive symptoms (Li et al., 2014), all of which can harm children's health and well-being (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Many jobs are not 9-to-5 Monday-through-Friday. Nationally, 20% of the workforce are on nonstandard schedules. The rate is higher – between 28% and 50% – among low-income workers (those earning below 200 percent of the federal poverty level [FPL]; Enchautegui, Johnson, & Gelatt, 2015) or workers in low-wage hourly jobs (defined in one study as jobs paying less than two-thirds the median wage for men; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Women are more likely than men to work nonstandard hours, especially women with low incomes, and many of them are responsible for young children (Crosby & Mendez, 2017). Nearly 30% of low-income mothers of children under age six work nonstandard hours (Enchautegui et al., 2015).


Even parents who work some hours between 9-to-5 also work nonstandard hours. Indeed, the most common type of parental work schedule experienced by young children in low-income households is a

combination of standard and nonstandard work hours (Crosby & Mendez, 2017). Nearly half of employed parents receiving child care subsidies in Cook County, Illinois, regularly worked at least one nonstandard hour, with the majority working at least 16 nonstandard hours per week (Illinois Action for Children, 2016). In single-parent working households, 27% of the parent's working hours are nonstandard. But having two working parents in a household doesn't mean that both parents won't be working nonstandard hours at the same time. Overall, 7% of parents' working hours are simultaneously nonstandard in households with two working parents, rising to between 11% and 15% in low-income households (NSECE, 2017; see also Knop & Laughlin, 2018).

Why would parents work nonstandard schedules? The vast majority of parents (72%) do so because the job demands it, rather than by choice (Enchautegui et al., 2013). Many report a lack of other job options, and most of the jobs with the highest share of nonstandard-schedule workers are among the fastest growing occupations (Enchautegui et al., 2013). For workers in tipped industries such as restaurant service, the prime shifts when most tips are earned are often at night and especially on weekends, putting pressure on employees to seek those shifts and, for those with children, to find child care during nonstandard hours (ROC United, 2016). Students, training program participants, and members of the military are often required to be at school or on duty during nonstandard and irregular hours (Adams et al., 2015; Child Care Aware, 2017). While it may be that parents in dual-earner households may try to "tag team," setting up their schedules to allow one parent to be home during the day and the other home at night, there is no evidence of this in recent census data (Knop and Laughlin, 2018). Rather, parents with a spouse who works a nonstandard schedule were more likely to work a nonstandard schedule themselves.

Many workers are given fluctuating schedules with little advance notice. Unpredictable work schedules that may fluctuate in hours by week, time of day, and/or length of shift are also frequent. Changes may include last-minute mandatory overtime or involuntary reduction in work hours. Some jobs may require both nonstandard hours and irregular schedules. Most service workers, production workers, and workers in skilled trades know their schedule one week or less in advance (Lambert et al., 2014). Among low-wage hourly workers, especially in retail and service industries, large percentages – between one-in-five to about two-thirds – of workers report experiencing various unpredictable scheduling practices (Henly & Lambert, 2014; Schneider & Harknett, 2016; Watson & Swanberg, 2011).

Retail workers report facing significant pressure to maintain open availability and to work a variable schedule, with over 50% reporting they felt that open availability was necessary to advance to a retail job with higher pay and more responsibility (Corser, 2017). Others felt open availability was necessary simply to pick up enough work hours – potentially - to meet financial needs (Carrillo et al., 2017). In some cases, these practices can be readily changed; in one study, managers at a retail chain received their staffing hours one month in advance but were posting them by week, so that employees learned their schedules on a Tuesday for their workweek starting that Sunday (Lambert et al., 2014). Posting by month would provide for more advance notice and planning for child care and other caregiving responsibilities.



Among retail and food service workers in **Philadelphia**, only 21% report a regular daytime work schedule (Schneider & Harknett, 2018). Among everyone else:

- 36% report “variable” work schedules
- 30% report “rotating” or “split shifts”
- Another 12% of workers report regular, non-standard night or evening schedules.

Dynamic variable scheduling software has given employers the ability to change employees’ schedules at the last minute, sometimes even within the same day, down to fifteen minute increments (Golden, 2015; Mitchell, 2017; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). This software, increasingly in use, permits managers to hire a large number of part-time employees who are required to be on call. Workers do not prefer these schedules. Among retail and food service workers, 70% would like more hours, and 86% would like more regular hours (Schneider & Harknett, 2016).

Use of dynamic scheduling software shifts the risks of business slumps from employers to employees (Ogden & Murdoch, 2017). This growing phenomenon can be summed up as “redistributing some of the uncertainty of doing business from corporations to families” (Tavernise, 2012). Large corporations contend that just-in-time business strategies using scheduling software allow them to match staffing with customer demand at the moment, thereby cutting labor costs and boosting profits (Golden, 2015; Lambert et al., 2012). However, new experimental research in retail stores suggests the opposite: that predictable employee schedules increase sales and productivity (Williams et al., 2018).

A sizeable proportion of workers with unpredictable schedules have caregiving responsibilities for children or relatives (e.g., Corser, 2017; ROC United, 2016). Of the nearly 30% of low-income mothers of children under age six who work nonstandard hours, about half work a regular nonstandard schedule, and the other half work an irregular nonstandard schedule (Enchautegui et al., 2015). Over one-third of young children, and nearly half of Hispanic children, in low-income households have a parent who receives their work schedule less than one week in advance (Crosby & Mendez, 2017).

Volatile schedules mean volatile incomes (Ben-Ishai, Matthews, & Levin-Epstein, 2014; Mitchell, 2017; Schneider & Harknett, 2016). Part time frontline (non-managerial) retail workers (e.g., sales associates, cashiers, stock associates, customer service representatives) report the greatest fluctuation in weekly hours among retail workers, with weekly earnings that could vary by almost a factor of two from week to week (Corser, 2017).²

² Even workers with full-time jobs are not protected from variable income (Ogden & Murdoch, 2017). Analyses of household cash flow show that half of the volatility in household income (which was high, with households experiencing a 25% spike or dip in income five months of the year on average, or almost half the time) was not due to fluctuating employment, but to changing income from the same job (Murdoch & Snyder, 2017).



Among retail and food service workers in **Philadelphia**, where the living wage is estimated to be \$11.70 per hour for a single person with no children and \$23.64 per hour for a single parent with one child, assuming consistent full-time work, (Schneider & Harknett, 2018):

- the average hourly wage was \$10.71
- 22% usually work less than 20 hours per week, another 25% usually work between 20 30 hours, another 35% report working between 30 and less than 40 hours per week, and only 17% work at least 40 per week
- 45% report that their income changes from week to week, and the average worker reported a gap of 14 hours between the week they worked the most and the week they worked the least over a one-month period
- 29% reported working an “on-call” work shift
- 70% of workers reported that they kept their schedule open and available for work though they may not actually work the shift

Many job schedule systems are rigid and give employees little say in their hours. Among low-wage hourly workers, roughly half have limited control over factors such as the hours they work in general and their start and end times (Lambert et al., 2014; Ogden & Morduch, 2017; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Overtime may be mandatory with little advance notice (Ben-Ishai, Matthews, & Levin-Epstein, 2014).

Voluntary and involuntary turnover is much higher among workers with rigid or unpredictable schedules compared to other workers. This has consequences for qualification for employer benefits and government unemployment and leave programs which depends, in many cases, on length of time on the job. Workers who experience shorter job tenure are less likely to receive employer-provided sick and vacation days, job-protected leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, and unemployment insurance (Watson & Swanberg, 2011).



Among retail and food service workers in **Philadelphia** (Schneider & Harknett, 2018)

- 34% receive less than one week advance notice of their schedule
- another 28% receive at least one week but less than two weeks’ notice
- Only 38% report receiving two or more weeks of advanced notice
- 16% reported having a shift cancelled in the past month.
- More than half of workers worked consecutive closing then opening shifts, often referred to as “clopening.”
- 45% have no input into their work schedules, almost 40% have some input, and only 16% have a large degree of control over their scheduled work days and times.

Workplace and employer strategies to improve job quality for employees with young children

Increase predictability. Businesses may benefit from dynamic scheduling, but they may also benefit from providing their employees with workplace flexibility and predictability. Sectors with typically high turnover may improve recruitment, retention, job commitment, and reduced absenteeism when flexibility is sufficient for employees to meet their family responsibilities (Lambert & Henly, 2012; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Stable schedules and reduced fluctuation improves worker performance (e.g., sufficient sleep; Golden, 2015). Predictable schedules may not just make it easier for working parents to manage child care, it may also improve their employer's bottom line. In one experiment, a small group of retail stores was randomly-assigned to give their employees two-week advance notice and eliminate on-call scheduling (Williams et al., 2018). Compared to control stores, these stores had a 7% increase in median sales and a 5% increase in labor productivity, generating an additional \$6.20 of revenue per hour of labor, suggesting that predictable scheduling may help working parents and their employers alike.

The need to balance employee schedule requests with the needs of the business can be a challenge. Some employers are implementing voluntary initiatives to provide advance notice of schedules. They guide managers to consider employee scheduling requests or provide other types of flexibility (Golden, 2015; Mitchell, 2017). Models may be best when they are industry-specific or targeted to small or large businesses. Employers can use scheduling software that includes other features, such as shift-swapping software or platforms that allow self-scheduling (Mitchell, 2017).

Employers can also provide some consistency in the number of hours, such as with a minimum number of hours per set pay period or, if relevant, allowing workers to work in more than one location so their hours add up to a certain minimum. They may also provide some guaranteed shifts or days, even if for only a proportion of workers' hours.

Increase flexibility and employee control. Managing scheduling flexibility, which is often at supervisor discretion, can be challenging for both the supervisor and the employee. Training can help. Managers who are trained in implementing family-supportive work scheduling can learn strategies to include employees in setting their assigned schedules that benefit both the business and the employee. Employees who are trained in understanding the scheduling process and how to make realistic requests and negotiate flexible schedules, to focus on performance expectations, and who are given guidance such as being specific while also being flexible when their schedule request will not work, can provide meaningful improvements in their schedules while meeting their employer's needs (Watson & Swanberg, 2011). When interventions improve supervisor support for flexibility and employees' sense of control over their work schedules, employee health and well-being are improved (Watson & Swanberg, 2011).

Child care supply

Child care during nonstandard hours or on a flexible schedule: high demand, low supply, and unknown quality

Child care options when parents work nontraditional or irregular schedules, particularly licensed child care, are in growing demand but are very limited. The arrangements parents do make are beset with problems. Ten percent of workers in nonstandard-hours jobs missed work because of child care problems, according to a survey of low-wage hourly workers (Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Of those, about half report workplace consequences such as some penalty, lost pay, or lost benefits. Forty-five percent of mothers working in the restaurant industry report unpredictable schedules, and one in five report that they lost a child care provider due to schedule fluctuations (ROC United, 2016). In recent years, researchers (e.g., Crosby & Mendez, 2016, 2017; Stoll & Alexander, 2015) and news outlets (e.g., Bahney, 2015; Durana, 2018; Ho, 2017; Quart, 2018; Tavernise, 2012; Toner, 2012) are reporting on the growing need and the ways that child care providers and families are trying to adjust, but accommodations still fall short of the need.

Need for care during nonstandard hours is high. The demand for nonstandard irregular-hour child care is high, particularly in certain areas and among families working in particular sectors (Chaudry, Pedroza, and Sandstrom 2012; Stoll, Alexander, & Sugimura, 2006; Thompson 2000). For example, 29% of child care requests in one county in Washington State – about 13,000 – were requests for nonstandard-hour care (Thompson, 2000). In the District of Columbia, between 12% and 23% of young children, depending on their age groups, are estimated to need care during nontraditional hours (Sandstrom, Greenberg, Derrick-Mills, Lou, Adelstein, & Runes, 2018). In suburban counties surrounding New York City and Chicago, a large proportion of subsidy-eligible children have single parents who work nonstandard hours. Families have a high need for early morning care in particular (Sandstrom, Claessens, Stoll, Greenberg, Alexander, Runes, & Henly, 2018). In rural poor counties in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, nontraditional work hours are much more common among poor families, center-based options are seldom available, and distances between home, work, and child care arrangements are greater and require a reliable car (Vernon-Feagans, Garrett-Peters, DeMarco, & Bratsch, 2012).

Demand varies widely from community to community. An analysis found that 14% of parent requests across California were for evening, weekend, or overnight care, but that county-by-county averages ranged from very low (1%) to very high (51%; [California CCR&R, 2013]). Similarly, 9% of parent referral requests across the District of Columbia were for nontraditional hours of care, but between 21% and 27% of requests in lower-income neighborhoods were for nontraditional-hours care (Sandstrom, Greenberg, et al., 2018).

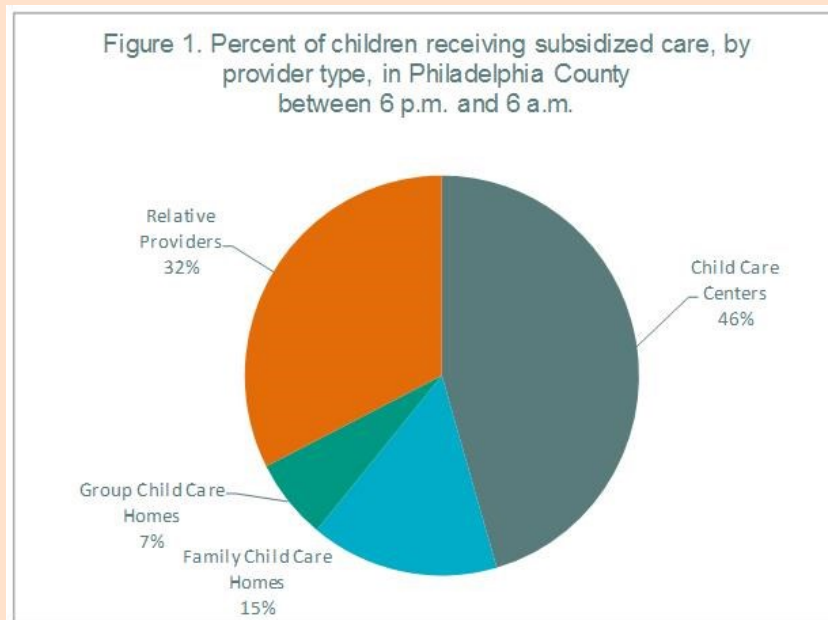
Potential need is higher among low-income families. By one estimate, children have a 75 percent greater chance of needing care during nontraditional hours when their families are income-eligible for child care subsidies compared to children from higher-income families (Sandstrom, Greenberg, et al., 2018).

Many young children experience nonstandard hours of care some or all of the time. Nationally, infants and toddlers spend about half their time in care in nonstandard hours and preschoolers spend about one-third; these rates are similar for low-income Hispanic, white, and black children (Crosby & Mendez, 2016). Demand is likely to be higher than the actual number of children who are in child care during nonstandard hours. However, it does provide some data to illustrate the need.



In Philadelphia, 10% of all children receiving subsidized child care were in care between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. The majority of these children are in home-based care arrangements, as shown in Figure 1. The remaining 46% are in center care. This rate is higher than the national rate of children in center-based care during non-standard hours and may include children who have only some hours of care outside the normal day. However, it is much lower than the overall rate for Philadelphia of children receiving subsidized child care in centers, which is about 80%. It may also reflect a very limited amount of time in nonstandard hour care, as the available data include children in care after 6 p.m. might be picked up by 7 p.m.

While less information is available on nonstandard-hour care arrangements for children in families who are not receiving subsidies, it is likely that the rate of center-based arrangements is lower as subsidies often make center care more affordable for low-income families that may otherwise be out of reach. Little is known about patterns of nontraditional hours of care among middle-income families with parents who work shifting or nonstandard hours.




Data Source: PELICAN January 2017.³

Note: The indicator that is collected to identify children receiving care between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. is not consistently used therefore these numbers may not be accurate, and most likely underreported.

³ Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) data up to January 2017 provided by the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) to PHMC on July 14, 2017. PELICAN is the Pennsylvania Departments of Human Services and Education management information system for all of the state's early learning programs.

Supply of nonstandard-hours care is low. Choices of child care during nonstandard or irregular hours are extremely limited and breakdowns are frequent (Ben-Ishai, et al., 2014; Usdansky & Wolf, 2008). Nationally, the supply of licensed/registered child care during nonstandard hours is very low (NSECE, 2015). Only 8% of centers offer any care during nonstandard hours; 2% offer evening care between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m.; 6% offer overnight care, and 3% offer weekend care. About a third of family child care providers who are registered or licensed offer some care during nonstandard hours. Family, friend, and neighbor caregivers often provide some flexibility and may be able to accommodate nonstandard hours of care better than licensed providers. A larger percentage of family, friends, and neighbor providers (FFN) who are not registered or licensed offer care during nonstandard hours -- nearly two-thirds of paid home-based providers and 82% of unpaid home-based providers. Many of these caregivers -- especially those who care for a child with whom they have a prior relationship -- do so in order to help the parent (NSECE, 2016).

Few children of parents working nontraditional hours are in center-based care; most are in family, friend, and neighbor care (FFN; [Sandstrom et al., 2018]). It is also common for children who receive care during nonstandard hours to experience multiple child care arrangements of the same type or a combination of home- and center-based arrangements; about 40% of children are in multiple arrangements compared with 28% of children who are in care during standard hours only (Crosby & Mendez, 2016; Enchautegui et al., 2015).



In **Philadelphia**, information about the supply of non-standard hour or flexible-schedule child care can be gleaned from provider responses to a profile survey collected for resource and referral purposes by the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).⁴ The number of child care providers in Philadelphia who report that they offer care during nonstandard hours or on flexible schedules is low. Averaged across all types of care, 540 child care sites provide evening care (32%), 377 sites provide night care (23%), and 446 sites provide weekend care (27%).

⁴ The OCDEL survey asks child care providers to report general schedules served. New providers must complete and submit this survey to their regional Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC), and ELRC staff enters it into the state's data system, PELICAN. Going forward, if providers elect to register for and participate in the provider self-service, they can update their service information on their own. The OCDEL child care subsidy policy and procedure manual defines "non-traditional care" as five or more hours of full-time care or three-to-less-than-five hours of part-time care provided weekdays between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., or any amount of care provided on a Saturday and/or a Sunday. Other schedule terms on the provider survey includes terms that providers regularly use but the survey does not define the schedule terms (e.g., "evening care", "24-hour care", "overnight care"). An ELRC staff member with many years' experience assisting providers with completing this survey offered common explanations for each term:

"Evening care"— provided from 6 p.m. to about 11 p.m. (usually to accommodate parents who work or go to school in the evening; the end time is not specifically defined by OCDEL)

"Overnight care"— the parent works and their child needs care between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. and it is understood that the child would usually be sleeping during those care hours. This is the only type of care for which a parent receiving subsidy can choose an in-home provider (someone who comes into their home to provide care).

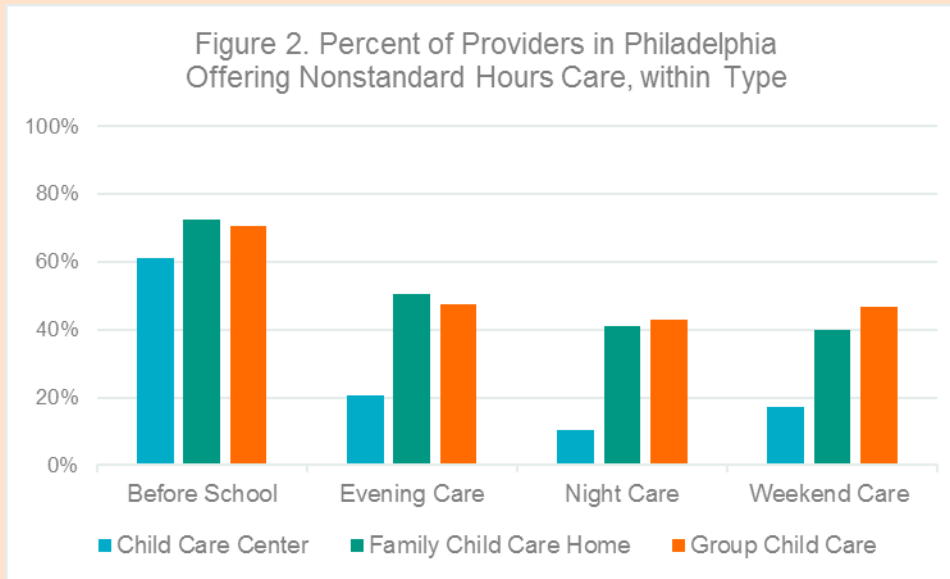
"Drop-in care"— allows children who are not enrolled to be dropped off for care as needed or allows children that are enrolled for a specific schedule to be dropped off for care outside of their regular schedule. Usually this type of care is only available if space and ratios allow it and if all documentation required for enrollment is provided by the parent.

"Flexible care"— the provider is willing to accept a child with a flexible enrollment schedule (maybe the parent works Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. one week and Tuesday through Saturday from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. the following week).

Providers have to make their own decisions about what the terms mean. This often leads to some overlap in a provider's reported schedules. Many of the choices providers make when completing the survey are subjective, based on their particular understanding (or lack of understanding) of the terms available to them. Terms may be used inconsistently. For example, some providers may use the term "overnight care" to indicate to parents who work the overnight shift that they provide care during the overnight hours, another provider may only check 24-hour care believing that this makes it clear that they offer overnight care and therefore they don't feel they need to check overnight care separately, and yet another provider may indicate that they offer both 24-hour and overnight care.

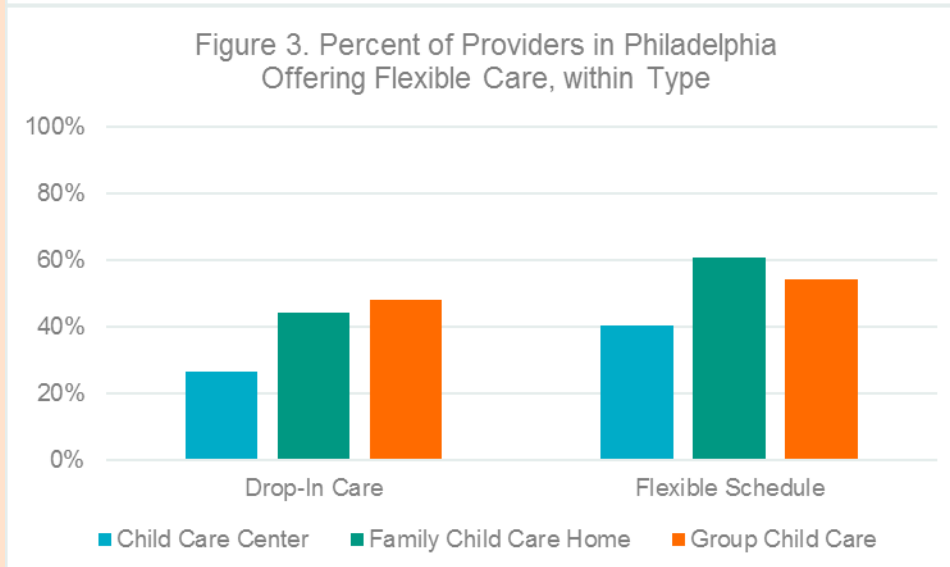
Schedules are tied to the type of provider. As shown in Figure 2, child care centers are much less likely to provide any of these nonstandard-hour options than are family or group child care homes. Evening care, for example, is offered in about one-fifth of centers and one-half of home-based sites. Overnight care and weekend care are even more skewed by type of provider. Only 10% of centers provide care overnight and 17% on the weekend, compared to between 40% to nearly 50% of family or group child care homes.

The bar chart in Figure 3 indicates drop-in care for parents with last-minute needs is also less likely in centers. While about one-third offer drop-in care overall, only 27% of centers provide drop-in care compared to 44% of family providers and nearly half of group child care homes. When considered alongside the smaller number of family child care providers, the lack of nonstandard-hour or flexible care in terms of raw numbers of options becomes stark.



Data Source : PELICAN January 2017. (see Footnote 3)

Notes: The terms for different schedules served are not defined by OCDEL. Providers determine whether each term applies to the schedules served at their site. In Figure 2, “night care” is a combination of any site that indicated they provide “24-hour care”, “overnight care,” or both.



Quality of care during nontraditional hours is not well-defined nor measured. Best practices for care may look somewhat different during an evening meal, at bedtime, or during evening or morning personal care routines. Positive caregiver-child interactions are important at any time of day but, of the indicators that define high quality during a regular day, some may need adjustment and others may be irrelevant in the evening hours. Shared bookreading, for example, is a valuable and recommended activity (International Reading Association & NAEYC, 1998) that is likely to be beneficial for children whether it is the parent or a caregiver reading with a child at bedtime. Screen time and television viewing, however, are common evening activities in many households, though pediatric and early education position statements generally discourage screen time for young children and recommend cautious use in early childhood programs (AAP, 2016; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012). Common daytime quality indicators related to curricula and assessment may be irrelevant and even developmentally inappropriate in the evening. Research and attention from the field, of which there is little, is needed to help caregivers and families provide high-quality care experiences during nonstandard hours.

Quality of child care during the evening and overnight

Standards and recommendations for best practices for child care during the evening or overnight have not been well defined or delineated. Future research should include evening or overnight care in the development of child care quality measures and in studies of the quality of available care.

State regulations may not explicitly mention requirements for care provided during evening or overnight hours. Twenty-eight states that license family child care homes have specific requirements about the supervision of children during the evening or overnight care (NCECQA, 2015). For example, Pennsylvania does not have explicit night care rules (PA Code). In contrast, Connecticut does have specific nightcare regulations and they differ for centers and family child care homes. Center-based care staff are required to be awake and available at all hours, plus regulations are in place regarding allowable beds and storage and labeling for sleeping apparel and toiletries, while family child care requirements are slightly different. Family child care staff are required to have appropriate, comfortable sleepwear and a separate bed in a proper location (i.e., quiet space on the same floor as the provider; CT Office of Early Childhood, 2017).

States even vary in what they define to be nontraditional hours care; for example, Connecticut defines it as care between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m., Pennsylvania's regulations define night care as care between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., and the District of Columbia defines nontraditional care hours as those between 6 p.m. and 7 a.m. Moreover, Pennsylvania's OCDEL child care subsidy policy and procedure manual defines "non-traditional care" as five or more hours of full-time care or three-to-less-than-five hours of part-time care provided weekdays between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., or any amount of care provided on a Saturday and/or a Sunday.

Caring for Our Children, which provides health and safety guidelines for out-of-home child care (AAP & APHA, 2014), considers evening child care routines to be similar to those of daytime care with the exception of sleep routines, the supervision of sleeping children, evacuation drills during the nighttime hours, and the management and maintenance of sleep equipment. Personal care routines at night and in the morning must address routines such as toileting/diapering, hygiene, tooth brushing, and dressing for the day. *Caring for Our Children* further notes that “sleeping time is a very sensitive time for infants and young children. Attention should be paid to individual needs, transitional objects, lighting preferences, and bedtime routines (Standard 9.2.3.13: Plans for Evening and Nighttime Child Care).”

Program accreditation standards from **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** and the **National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)**, while addressing sleep safety and routines, do not mention evening or nighttime hours. The program standards include some elements which are likely to apply to interactions at any time of day, such as promoting positive relationships between all children and adults. Other program standards are less applicable to the evening hours, such as NAEYC’s standards regarding implementing a curriculum that promotes learning and development.

What does it mean for children when they are in child care in the evening, on weekends, or overnight? Little U.S. research has studied associations between care experiences during nonstandard hours and child development. In Japan, which established government-authorized nightcare facilities with standards regarding maintaining children’s natural circadian rhythms (Anme & Segal, 2003), research shows that long and/or extended hours in care are not correlated with children’s development (Anme et al. 2010; Anme et al. 2012). However, the research did not directly measure the quality of care, which is consistently shown to be critical to child development (Bradley & Vandell, 2007). In addition, formal systems of center-based nightcare facilities are rare in other nations (Anme & Segal, 2010). In the U.S., center-based night care is scarce (2 to 6%; NSECE, 2015). Individual state regulations vary in whether they explicitly mention nightcare and, if they do, in whether those regulations are any different from those for providing care during the day.

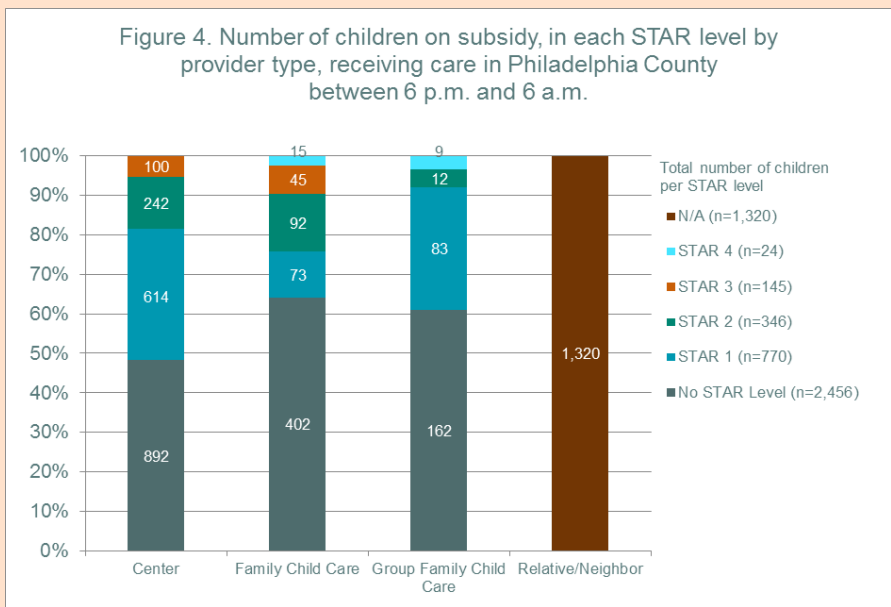


In **Philadelphia**, data from Pennsylvania’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), Keystone STARS, provides two windows on the overlap between child care quality and nonstandard-hour care:

- the numbers of children who are in high-quality care during such hours,
- the numbers of high-quality providers who offer nonstandard-hour or flexible care.

Only a small percentage of children who receive care between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. who are receiving subsidized child care are in care with providers at the higher STAR-rating levels, as shown in Figure 4. One in five children receiving subsidized care in the evening hours or overnight were receiving care from eligible providers rated STAR 2 or above (19%). Six percent were in care with STAR 3 or STAR 4 providers. More than two-thirds (68%) of Philadelphia children receiving subsidized child care who were in care during nonstandard hours were receiving care from a provider who was not in STARS, as of January 2017. About half of those (52%) were in care with a provider who was licensed (i.e., a center, family child care provider, or group family child care provider) but not in STARS, and the other half (48%) were in care with relatives or neighbors who are not eligible for STARS. The quality of care of providers who are not in STARS has not been evaluated to the degree undertaken by participating providers. As for relative and neighbor caregivers, evidence from around the country suggests that the quality of license-exempt family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care varies widely (as it does for all child care) but FFN caregivers may lack supports such as access to training and resources that would help them provide high levels of quality to the children in their care.

Figure 4. Number of children on subsidy, in each STAR level by provider type, receiving care in Philadelphia County between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.



Data Source: PELICAN January 2017 (see Footnote 3)
 Notes: The indicator that is collected to identify children receiving care between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. is not consistently used, so these numbers may not be completely accurate, likely underreported. Relative providers are not eligible to participate in STARS. Providers’ STAR Ratings are from January 2017, prior to the STARS re-visioning process; as of July 1, 2017, all licensed providers in Pennsylvania automatically receive a STAR 1 rating.

Similarly, small percentages of providers offer care during nonstandard hours (Figure 5) or on flexible schedules (Figure 6). Of these, the providers at the higher STAR levels are least likely to offer such schedules.



Data Source : PELICAN January 2017. (see Footnote 3)

Notes: The terms for different schedules served are not defined by OCDEL. Providers determine whether each term applies to the schedules served at their site. In Figure 5, “night care” is a combination of any site that indicated they provide “24-hour care”, “overnight care,” or both.

Why is supply of quality nonstandard hour or flexible care so low? Many child care providers do not offer part-time slots and require families to commit to a set schedule and number of hours. Centers in particular are unlikely to offer care that is not during normal business hours, full time, and on a regular schedule. Centers and some other providers have basic, fixed business costs they must cover, including rent and utilities. Licensed providers – both home- and center-based – are typically unable to accommodate last-minute scheduling changes or variable hours of care. Licensed providers must have sufficient staff present in order to stay in compliance with child-staff ratio and group size regulations. An extra child or two dropped off with little notice could mean being out of ratio.

It is not a sustainable business model for centers to accept payment levels that change from week to week, as they cannot operate their business and hire personnel with inconsistent and unreliable cash

flow (Gordon, Lambouths, Colaner, and Krysan, 2014). But, volatile incomes from volatile schedules makes it hard for families to know what child care they can afford and hard to pay for that care. Unsteady incomes can interfere with child care subsidy eligibility and maintenance (Sandstrom et al., 2015). A child or two who does not come and does not pay could mean that the provider is paying more staff than needed. Centers may send staff home when this happens, which means that the child care workforce is also confronted with the same issues of being on-call or a lack of predictable work schedules and wages that many of the parents they serve are facing. Filling child slots last-minute can be very difficult and unpredictable. Indeed, the low supply of nonstandard-hours licensed child care may be tied to the irregularity of the child care needs of parents with unpredictable work schedules (Lambert et al. 2014; Thompson 2000).

Recent federal subsidy regulation changes allow a child to maintain subsidy for 12 months regardless of fluctuation in parent employment or earnings, rather than being tightly connected to parent work (Office of Child Care, 2014), which can help families receiving child care subsidies maintain employment and care. However, most eligible families are not receiving subsidies, and many more are just outside the eligibility range but still struggling (Sandstrom et al., 2015). Furthermore, states vary in how they implement federal child care subsidies and other policies; this will be discussed more in the next section.

Strategies to increase supply of high-quality flexible or nonstandard-hour child care

Solutions relevant to supporting all child care providers:

Support new and established family child care providers. Family child care providers can often be more flexible than centers and are more likely to provide nonstandard-hours care (Ben-Ishai et al., 2015; Illinois Action for Children, 2013; NSECE, 2015). However, the number of family child care homes is on a downward trend (decreasing by 15 percent between 2011 and 2014, with the total number of licensed centers and homes decreasing by 9 percent in that period; NCECQA 2015). In addition, family child care providers may not be eager to extend their hours longer than a standard workday schedule (NWLC, 2018). Incentives and support for potential providers to start a family child care business and obtain a license plus access and incentives for training and professional development can increase supply. Family child care providers in particular could benefit from quality and financial supports to provide care at night or on the weekends on flexible schedules, as described below. Marketing campaigns can increase public awareness and understanding about the potential benefits of family child care, so parents understand that FCC is a good option for nonstandard hour care.

Increase opportunities for providers to network with each other. Through informal and formal networking opportunities, providers can learn strategies from each other. Providers can support each other around the management of their own family and child care, which may be especially relevant for overnight care. Providers can also refer families across their network group; parents may be more likely to trust a referral from someone they know.

Increase shared services. Shared services arrangements, perhaps administered by an intermediary organization such as a community-based nonprofit or professional association, can support providers who provide nonstandard or flexible-hours care. For example, providers can share a pool of substitute staff and other strategies to support administrative functions related to providing nonstandard-hour care (Matthews et al., 2015).

Include quality of care and best practices of care during nonstandard hours in research on child care quality and on development of assessment tools. As noted above, quality of care during nonstandard hours has not been well defined or delineated, nor do widely-used quality of care assessment tools address indicators of quality during evening or overnight care. Future research is needed to shape assessments and to guide standards, recommendations of best practice, and technical assistance.

Provide technical assistance around management of nonstandard hour care.

Operating a center or a family child care home that provides child care in the evening, overnight, or on weekends is different than operating a 6 a.m.-to-6 p.m. Monday-to-Friday child care program. Providers can benefit from guidance on staffing, physical equipment and arrangement of the space, meals and snacks, health and safety, and other questions they may have about staying in compliance with regulations. Business models, insurance, and the structure of arrangements, contracts, and payments with parents may look different as well. Technical assistance can help providers work through their current services and how to adapt them to expand their hours of operation and the flexibility of their schedules.

Assure providers that weekend and evening care slots will be filled when an employer has a known worker need. Employers and institutions with many second shift workers such as factories and shipping centers, grocery store chains with a unionized workforce, medical centers, or military facilities can purchase slots in community child care centers to expand the supply of evening and weekend care to support their workers (if they don't open their own on-site extended-hour center). More providers may be willing to remain open for longer hours with this guarantee that their slots will be filled (Warner et al., 2004).

Share ideas about alternative business models such as drop-in care, back-up or emergency care, and pop-up care. Some providers are testing business models that allow parents to purchase packages of drop-in hours and sign up for care as needed (e.g., parents register in an online portal that permits a parent to sign up for drop-in care on a given day with 24-hours' notice). Child care providers can contract with employers to offer employees discounted rates for back-up care. Referral networks, provider networks, or businesses and websites that connect parents with child care providers who offer drop-in/last-minute care can help parents in need of care on an irregular schedule, such as freelancers or others with unpredictable schedules. Child care providers can offer pop-up on-site child care for school holidays, conferences, and other unusual days when child care hours do not match parent work hours.

Illustrate areas of unmet market demand. Child care maps (e.g., childcaremap.org) have the potential to overlay neighborhood supply and demand (Acuña, Norton, & Goldstein, 2018; Claessens, 2017; Sandstrom et al., 2018) and demonstrate unmet need within a community. For example, if data could be collected or acquired from administrative sources or direct surveys, it may indicate high demand for evening and overnight care but inadequate supply in communities in close proximity to a hospital, airport, retail and restaurant district, or a 24-hour warehouse. The maps may be illustrative to providers who are considering expanding their services temporally.

Incorporate extended-hour care into the planning process for new construction and infrastructure expansions for relevant employers. Child care is part of the infrastructure for economic development, and the location and availability of child care can affect other community development goals (Anderson & Dektar, 2011; Warner et al., 2004). Large employers that are open late nights, on weekends, or around the clock, such as hospitals and airports, are likely to have parents on staff who are in need of child care while they work nonstandard hours. New construction or expansion building projects could be reviewed in regards to impact on demand for nonstandard-hour child care and provisions could be put in place to ensure that the employer includes on-site 24-hour care or enters into contracts with community providers to meet the need.

Solutions specific to child care subsidies:

Incentivize extended- and flexible-hours care. Providers interested in offering extended-hour care may respond to financial incentives to offset expenses and uncertainties of irregular or nonstandard hour care. For example, child care subsidy reimbursement rates could be higher between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. (discussed further in the policy section below), or a standard minimum payment could be made available to providers who offer extended or flexible hours so the provider can retain staff and stay open regardless of some day-to-day attendance fluctuation.

Open up subsidy eligibility to in-home providers for overnight care. Parents who need overnight care may prefer a caregiver (usually a relative) to come to the family's home. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, permit parents receiving subsidy to choose an in-home provider and pay them with the subsidy.

Labor and child care policies

Labor and child care public policies and nonstandard-hour child care

Understanding the scope of the issue is the first step to being able to shape efforts to help children and families facing the increasingly common challenge of parents' nonstandard work schedules. Strategies to address the issue may include:


- adjustments to workplace conditions,
- increases in the supply of high-quality flexible and nonstandard-hours child care, and
- revisiting subsidy provisions to facilitate affordable access to high-quality care and support providers who offer it during nonstandard hours.

Many of these strategies can be supported or even required through state and city policy changes. Modifications to labor standards can provide more stable, predictable jobs for working parents even as they support businesses. In cases where business scheduling practices are not changeable, other policies can help reduce the stress and strain on families (Watson & Swanberg, 2011). In concert, modifications to child care policies can improve access to and affordability of child care for parents who do not work regular 9-to-5 Monday-to-Friday jobs.

Labor policy. Workers in jobs with irregular, unpredictable hours where they need to be on call, many of whom are part time, are often considered to be underemployed or to have involuntary part-time employment. Not only does this constrain family income, make employees' daily lives unpredictable and complicate caring for children, interfere with continuing their own education, and restrict taking on other part time jobs, it restrains or makes volatile the wages earned that pay for child care (Golden, 2015; Mitchell, 2017). Labor laws can support predictable scheduling and pay provisions for employees (Ben-Ishai et al., 2014) and "help ease the incidence, frequency, or consequences of having too few or unpredictable work hours" (Golden, 2015, p. 6). Provisions may be modified by sector or be specific to certain categories of employers. In many cases there can be exclusions for first responders, exceptions in emergencies, and other limits.

As suggested by Lambert and colleagues (2014, p. 19), "Legislation that establishes a comprehensive set of standards on scheduling practices is needed to ensure that workers in all occupations and at all levels of the labor market stand a fair chance of thriving at both work and home." Several standards have been suggested and some have been enacted into legislation in a few cities and states. For example:

- **Advance notice or "fair workweek"** laws are in place in several cities and states to require employers to provide some predictability or consistency in the schedules or number of hours (Mitchell, 2017; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). For example, businesses may be required to give employees as much notice as possible about their schedules and schedule changes (Lambert et al., 2014), provide some guaranteed shifts or days, even if only a proportion, or provide a minimum number of hours per set pay period or, if relevant, allow workers to work in more than one location to make up hours.



In Philadelphia, the new “Fair Work Week” ordinance requires chain retailers and restaurants to give workers two weeks’ notice of their hourly schedules. Other cities states have enacted or are considering such legislation, including New York City, San Jose, Emeryville, and San Francisco in California, Seattle, and the state of Oregon (Wolfe, Jones, & Cooper, 2018). The laws vary, but require a certain amount of advance notice of work schedules, stipulate that workers be compensated when their shifts are changed on shorter notice, and often include an “access to hours” provision requiring that employers offer additional hours or shifts to their part-time workers before hiring new part-time employees.

- **Minimum hour requirements** provide more stable work hours and income to employees. Requiring minimum hours also increases the fixed costs of each new hire, thereby discouraging employers to keep a high headcount of part-time, on-call workers.
- **Reporting time pay requirements**, sometimes called “show-up pay,” include paying workers some minimum even if work is slow. Several states and localities have some reporting time pay requirements (Golden, 2015; Mitchell, 2017; Watson & Swanberg, 2011).
- **Limits on mandatory overtime** and **time-and-one-half overtime pay** laws are in place, but additional guidance to employers is needed. Alternatives such as biweekly compressed workweeks have been proposed, but to be carefully implemented they must still require employers to fulfill overtime obligations.
- **“One Fair Wage”** movements and modifications to **minimum wage laws** can balance discrepancies in wages earned in different shifts in restaurant jobs and other tipped industries. Raising the minimum wage and eliminating the subminimum wage for tipped workers (ROC United, 2016) can help employees with young children access stable child care while not missing out on the most well-paid shifts.
- **“Right to Refuse”** or **“Right to Request”** laws create a process employers must follow when considering employee schedule requests to give employees some flexibility or control over their schedule. Some states and cities in the U.S. and other countries have such a “process requirement” (including New Hampshire, Vermont, and San Francisco; Wolfe, Jones & Cooper, 2018), but they are still relatively untested. Among the unknowns are potential risks such as retaliation against the employee as well as guidance and parameters for employers and workers (Golden, 2015; Mitchell, 2017; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Specific sectors have unique processes; for example, nurses are allowed to refuse shifts longer than 12 hours in a 24-hour period in some states (Watson & Swanberg, 2011).

Child care policy. Some state regulations and subsidy policies have the effect, usually unintentionally, of putting up barriers to the provision of and access to care outside the typical Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5 work schedule.

- **Child care regulations.** The legislative definition of night care varies state to state (for example, Pennsylvania is between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., while Connecticut is between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.; CT Office of Early Childhood, 2017; PA Code). Some states restrict the hours children can be in consecutively. Regulations that apply specifically to night care may be nonexistent in a state, or may vary between states or between types of providers. For example, states may have specific requirements regarding ratios and whether staff need to be awake for supervision purposes during the overnight hours, or whether unannounced inspections could be conducted in the middle of the night. Regulations that allow more flexibility may encourage more providers to extend hours during a time with more unpredictable levels of demand. Clarity and consistency in regulations, with detailed communication, would also help providers who are willing to provide nonstandard-hours care (Matthews et al., 2015).
- **Family eligibility for subsidies.** Subsidy policies do not block families from using their child care subsidy for care during the evening or at night nor for unpredictable hours. However, the rules and restrictions on eligibility can have the unintended effect of making it very difficult to receive and use a child care subsidy during such hours. States set their eligibility and authorization policies for child care assistance to low-income working families within broad federal guidelines. For example, while not a requisite of federal law, some states require parents to show documentation or require the hours of authorized care to match actual work hours. Such requirements can be especially problematic when parents' schedules are volatile. In addition, some states do not allow subsidies to be used for child care for a parent's time spent in educational activities, which limits parents' ability to obtain degrees and credentials (Sandstrom, Grazi, & Henly, 2015).
- **Provider eligibility for subsidies.** Subsidies can be used for care by license-exempt providers under the 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG; Office of Child Care, 2014). Often license-exempt care is the only option for parents who work nonstandard hours when licensed care is not available or flexible enough to meet fluctuating work schedules (Matthews et al., 2015). When meeting the recent CCDBG requirements, states can consider whether and how they would manage the monitoring of providers who come to the child's home for evening care and permit use of subsidies to pay for that in-home care.

Pennsylvania permits parents receiving subsidy to choose a provider to come into their home to provide care overnight while the child sleeps.

- **Subsidy maintenance.** The 2014 CCDBG reauthorization includes provisions to help families access child care even with fluctuating or nonstandard work schedules. The eligibility redetermination period was increased to 12 months, helping families maintain steady access to child care subsidies. The 2014 CCDBG reauthorization does not have minimum work-hour requirements for eligibility, requirements that states verify a parent’s job schedule and hours, or requirements that the child’s child care hours match exactly to the parent’s work hours (Johnson-Staub et al., 2015). However, states can set such requirements. Within the federal guidelines, which are broad and less-restrictive, states instead could set requirements so that irregular or volatile parent work schedules do not make it difficult to maintain access to child care assistance.

Pennsylvania has a minimum 20-hour work requirement to maintain child care subsidy, though it can be a combination of work and training and parents are not required to report fewer hours between redeterminations. The state does capture schedules and match child care and parent work hours though can handle fluctuation by averaging the need for care.

- **Subsidy reimbursement requirements.** CCDBG reauthorization requires states to increase the supply of child care for unmet needs, including care during nonstandard work hours (Ben-Ishai and Matthews, 2014; Office of Child Care, 2014). Limiting child care provider subsidy payments to days when children attend child care may create a disincentive for child care providers to accept children whose parents have volatile work schedules (Johnson-Staub, Matthews, & Adams, 2015; Schulman & Blank, 2017). Child care providers may be more willing to care for children receiving assistance when children are authorized for full-time care on a regular basis, or when subsidy payment policies are less tied to the circumstances of parental employment and more closely resemble the payment practices of families who pay for child care privately. States can set a pay-by-enrollment policy, where the provider is paid based on a child’s enrollment status as part-time or full-time, rather than a fee-for-service policy, where payment is based on the actual number of days the child spends in care (Matthews et al., 2015).
- **Subsidy reimbursement rates.** Child care subsidy reimbursement rates could be higher between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. to offset expenses and uncertainties of providing nonstandard-hour care (Matthews et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Nonstandard and irregular work hours are here to stay. Data on the scope of the issue, however, are hard to come by. The schedules of parents who do not work 9-to-5 Monday-to-Friday jobs make child care responsibilities difficult to meet. But, these parents do not all face the same challenges. A nightshift parent with a regular schedule has different needs than a retail or food service worker who is on call and doesn’t know week to week, or even day to day, when or how much he or she will work. There is a pressing need for information on parents’ nonstandard or irregular schedules, and how they manage to care for their children while working, in Philadelphia and indeed around the country.

Employers in different sectors have an important voice in their labor needs and their scheduling practices. And, child care providers, who are often more than willing to help the families of children in their care, have key insight into the barriers and challenges they face to providing care during nonstandard hours or on flexible schedules. A critical next step is to gather survey data and ask questions in in-depth conversations with working parents, employers, and child care providers. Discussions of effective strategies to meet these needs will have the greatest chance of success when multiple stakeholders are engaged, including working parents with young children, employers and the business community, child care providers, and state and local policymakers (Adams et al., 2016).

Affordable and accessible high-quality care that meets the needs of working parents and higher-quality jobs and viable career pathways for low-income workers are key for child development and family well-being, and are all part of economic and community development (Anderson & Dektar, 2011; Warner et al., 2004). Cross-system collaboration, communication, and flexibility are key to meeting the needs of families, children, and employers (e.g., Adams, Derrick-Mills, Heller, 2016). Employers, states and cities, and child care providers are testing out different initiatives. Research and evaluation of these new and emerging ideas – many of which have not been tried before – will be important to understand what works and is worth taking to scale (e.g., Williams et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2017). Child care that is high quality and serves the needs of working parents is part of a well-functioning healthy community, even when jobs are not Monday-to-Friday 9-to-5.

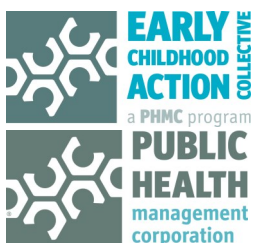
Acknowledgements

For review and for input, the ECAC would like to thank

Juliet Bromer, Erikson Institute
Norma Finkelstein, Federation Early Learning Services
Bevin Parker-Cerkez, Reinvestment Fund
Christie Balka, (formerly) Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Education
Betsy Vassallo, Pennsylvania Early Learning Resource Center Region 19
Kelly Thompson and Priya Mehta, PHMC Research and Evaluation Group
Sue Hoffman, Philadelphia Works

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The Early Childhood Action Collective (ECAC), an initiative of Public Health Management Corporation and sponsored by the William Penn Foundation, is a multi-disciplinary consortium connecting researchers, policy experts, and practitioners who share a commitment to creating a better future for Philadelphia's children by informing policy and practice decisions to help move Philadelphia's early childhood education sector forward. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.

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