Having an employed parent is a major contributor to financial stability and well-being for families. Parental employment is associated with higher family income, which in turn, is associated with many positive child outcomes including better health, behavior, academic achievement, and financial well-being as adults. Parental employment also brings challenges relating to the care of children.

North Dakota has the largest percentage of working adults in the nation (80% in 2017) and the second lowest unemployment rate among states (2.6% in 2017). In addition, 85 percent of North Dakota parents are employed, which is the second largest percentage among states (behind Iowa and Minnesota which are tied for first). This suggests that most children in North Dakota may be in need of quality early care and education opportunities.

In fact, 75 percent of North Dakota children ages 0 through 13 lived in families where all the parents were in the labor force in 2016 (i.e., 96,010 children statewide) - which was larger than the national average of 68 percent (Figure 1 and Table 1) and was the ninth largest percentage among states.

The distribution of children with working parents differs by age. As children become older, parents are more likely to enter/return to the labor force. Thus, older children ages 6 through 13 are more likely than younger children ages 0 through 5 in North Dakota to live in households with all parents working (78% and 70%, respectively in 2016). Differences exist with respect to geography as well. In six North Dakota counties, at least 90 percent of young children ages 0 through 5 lived in households where all parents were working in 2016 (Griggs, Divide, Golden Valley, Eddy, Ramsey, and Bowman) (Table 1).

With most parents working, reliable and affordable child care can help provide parents with greater opportunity to be productive at work and school. In addition, high-quality child care nurtures, stimulates, and supports children as they build the confidence and critical capacities they need to thrive in school and in life.

As of February 2018, there were 1,470 licensed child care providers in North Dakota with the capacity to care for 40,228 children. As there are 96,010 children potentially needing care, this means that licensed child care programs in the state have the ability to meet approximately 42 percent of potential need. According to Child Care Aware of North Dakota, national child care standards recommend that licensed care should meet at least 50 percent of potential need.

Currently, only five counties in North Dakota meet this recommended minimum (Adams, Cass, Logan, Ramsey, and Traill) (Figure 2).

Strong labor force participation is indicative of vibrant local and regional economic development. When parents have secure employment and earn enough to meet their families’ basic needs, children benefit. In many cases, secure employment often means having access to reliable and affordable child care. Understanding how North Dakota is meeting the needs of working parents is critical to providing greater opportunities for quality early child care.
| Area            | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | United States | North Dakota | Adams | Barnes | Benson | Billings | Bottineau | Bowman | Burke | Burleigh | Cass | Cavalier | Dickey | Divide | Dunn | Eddy | Emmons | Foster | Golden Valley | Grand Forks | Grant | Griggs | Hettinger | Kidder | LaMoure | Logan | McHenry | McIntosh | McKenzie | McLean | Mercer | Morton | Mountrail | Nelson | Oliver | Pembina | Pierce | Ramsey | Ransom | Renville | Richland | Rolette | Sargent | Sheridan | Sioux | Slope | Stark | Steele | Stutsman | Towner | Traill | Walsh | Ward | Wells | Williams | Note: na Data not available |
|----------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|------------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|-------|--------|---------|--------|---------|-------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                | 14,968,587 | 65.0%   | 21,955,621 | 70.6% | 36,924,208 | 68.2% | na     | na     |            |          |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |              |              |      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |  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