

Improving Job Quality in the Childcare Sector

Assessing the JVS Job Quality Benchmarking Index

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Summary

Job quality is a critical component of workforce development. While wages provide a clear measure of comparison in job listings, job-seekers are interested in benefits beyond pay. These characteristics can be hard to measure, making it difficult for both employers and employees across an industry to compare organizations holistically. [Jewish Vocational Service \(JVS\) Boston](#) is the largest workforce development agency in greater New England. In 2017, in an effort to improve jobs for employees, they began development of the Job Quality Benchmarking Index (JQBI). This is a tool that employers can use to measure the quality of their positions against their peers. It provides recommendations to employers for specific areas of improvement across 5 pillars: Wages, Benefits, Scheduling, Access to Career Ladders, and Supportive Environment.

In partnership with JVS Boston, a research team from Northeastern University set out to assess employer usage of the JQBI using a mixed-methods industry case study focused on childcare. Ensuring that parents can get to work much in the way that roads and bridges do, childcare is an essential piece of the nation's economic infrastructure. Moreover, many of the challenges facing both employers and employees were exacerbated by the pandemic, highlighting the urgent need for improvements in job quality in this industry.

This policy brief provides a summary of the key findings from the [research report](#) which assesses the use of the JQBI among JVS Boston employer partners in the childcare industry. This includes insights drawn from a series of qualitative interviews conducted with JVS Boston employer partners and their employees which focused on the changes each organization made to job quality as well as its performance across the each of the five pillars. The research concludes with a reflection on the strengths of the JQBI as well as recommendations for its future expanded use across other industries.

Improving Job Quality

As economic inequality poses a crucial challenge to our economy and society, job quality has become a greater focus of workforce development efforts. Increasing the number of high-quality jobs is essential to provide individuals with the benefits of their labor and give them the opportunity to not only achieve economic stability, but also to thrive. But beyond simply looking at earnings, what qualifies as a “good job” includes 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 options. Similarly, if employers are going to be successful at filling open positions, it is essential that they understand how their jobs stack up against other organizations.

As the largest workforce development agency in greater New England, Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) Boston sits at the intersection of both employers and job seekers. JVS Boston helps employer partners attract and retain a productive workforce. They also assist job seekers in gaining marketable skills and negotiating the best employment opportunities available.

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 have 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 \(JQBI\)](#). The JQBI is a tool employers can use to benchmark the quality of their jobs against their peers and the overall labor market. The goal of the JQBI is to provide employers with specific areas for improvements that can be acted upon in small ways that have an immediate impact. Armed with this data, many employer partners have made incremental, and in some cases dramatic, improvements in their jobs.

The JQBI is an important component of JVS Boston’s 3-year strategic plan, which has job quality as a top priority. By increasing the quality of jobs in the sectors in which they train, JVS Boston aims to shift employer practices for both their future and incumbent workers. This will include tracking the percentage of clients in what JVS Boston has defined as a quality job; one that pays, at minimum, Boston’s living wage, and offers full-time hours and full benefits upon hire.

What is the Job Quality Benchmarking Index (JQBI)?

Qualifying a position as a “good job” involves assessing many characteristics, not just pay, that can be difficult to measure. To address this, JVS Boston developed the JQBI as an innovative tool that can be used by employers to assess themselves across multiple dimensions and provide targeted information that can be used to re-design job elements over time to better meet employee needs. Specifically, it provides an overview of 5 pillars deemed valuable by JVS job seekers and client-facing staff. These are based on the categories set forth by the “Job Design Framework” developed by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions¹, a well-respected resource and basis for work in this area. The resulting pillars include questions that cover

¹ [Job Design Framework](#). National Fund for Workforce Solutions, 2023.

Wages, Benefits, Scheduling, Access to Career Ladders, and Supportive Environment that were scored based on the rubric shown in Figure 1.

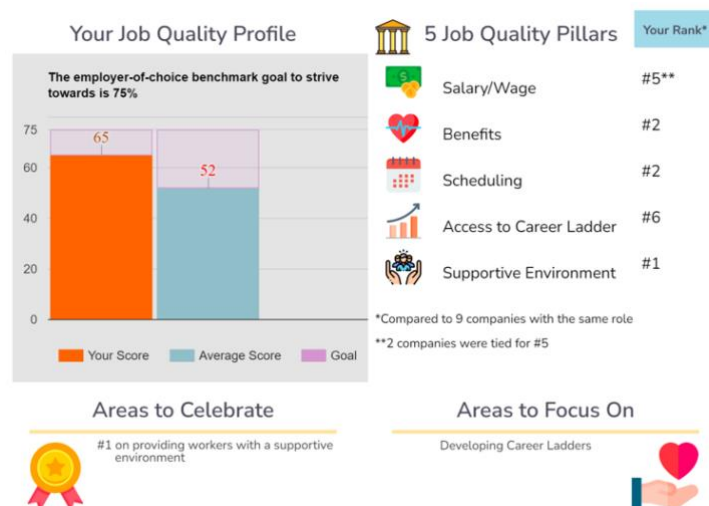
Figure 1. Job Quality Benchmarking Index Survey

5 Pillars	# of scored questions
Salary/Wage	2
Schedule Flexibility/Predictability	5
Availability of Benefits	3
Access to a Career Ladder	6
Supportive Work Environment	19
<i>Safety</i>	4
<i>Training</i>	4
<i>Supervision/Feedback/Rewards</i>	6
<i>Diversity & Inclusion</i>	5

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. Based on the pillars, JVS Boston created a set of survey questions to assess quality within each category. Internal JVS experts 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" that is included in the summary report prepared for each employer.

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 employers stacked up to their peers within the industry across the five pillars of job quality. The finalized version of the JQBI is now housed in a custom designed software platform developed by Gibbs Software Solutions. In a process of continuous improvement, JVS Boston makes enhancements to the index on an annual basis. A sample JQBI report is provided below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Sample Job Quality Benchmarking Index Report



Source: JVS Boston: https://www.jvs-boston.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/summary_report-2024-06-06T160903.499.pdf

Industry Case Study: Early Childcare Centers

Given that the JQBI is a relatively new tool, the research team at Northeastern chose to conduct a mixed-methods industry case study. This assessed employer usage of the tool in redesigning various aspects of job quality and the potential impact on both their employees and the organization. The team focused on the childcare industry—a sector for which the pandemic has highlighted the critical role that it plays in the economy as well as the urgent need for improving job quality for workers. JVS Boston has strong relationships in this sector, having played an important role in training childcare providers through their [Early Childhood Education \(ECE\)](#) employment pipeline program. Additionally, over 50 childcare organizations have completed the JQBI survey, enabling the team to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from employer partners and JVS clients placed at each organization.

The 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 impact, the team combined quantitative and qualitative data. They evaluated the landscape of the childcare industry in terms of employment, skill requirements, and wages alongside a set of interviews that captured actual changes in employer practices and the lived experiences of employees.

Contextualizing the qualitative data within the broader industry landscape expanded the understanding of whether the experiences of employer partners were representative of the Greater Boston childcare sector. Then comparing information from employer and employee interviews within the same organization allowed the team to determine if job quality redesigns had their intended effect.

The Importance of Job Quality in the Childcare Industry

While the childcare system has always been an essential component of the economic infrastructure that supports the state's workforce, it has further become a factor in helping parents return to work after the pandemic. The disruption caused by the pandemic has exacerbated the industry's long-standing challenges such as the slim operating margins for

providers, lack of affordable care for families, and long waitlists—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 evaluating the impact of the JQBI on organizations, employees, and the broader industry landscape. While there are many varied childcare settings, the analysis below is focused on the care of children in paid arrangements by a day-care center, nursery school, or pre-school—rather than a babysitter, nanny, or other provider. Specifically, it is restricted to workers at establishments in the “Childcare Day Care Services” industry that JVS

Boston typically works with, as well as job openings aligned with the entry level positions and career pathways that employers referenced when taking the JQBI survey. In seeking to “build back better” after the pandemic, the importance of job quality in the childcare industry cannot be overlooked—it is a crucial factor in providing the economic infrastructure needed for children, parents, and businesses alike.

The Role of Childcare in the Economy

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. In Massachusetts alone, the industry produced \$1.69 billion in direct revenue and employed nearly 39,100 workers prior to the pandemic.²

Second, childcare supports economic growth primarily through increased labor force participation among parents, especially mothers. The Massachusetts economy is particularly dependent on the infrastructure that childcare provides. As of 2019, roughly 70% of children ages 0-5 were in non-parental care for more than 10 hours per week in the Bay State compared to just over 50% nationwide.

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.³ Prior to the pandemic, Massachusetts ranked among the top five states in terms of the generosity with its childcare subsidies, which were further expanded during the pandemic through the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants.

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

² [Child Care in State Economies: 2019](#). Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board, 2019.

³ Ibid

children from low-income families and their more affluent peers that emerge well before kindergarten and largely persist throughout K–12.⁴ During the pandemic, 84% 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.⁵

Accessing childcare, however, remains a challenge. Over the past two decades, the cost of childcare has more than doubled while wages have remained stagnant. 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. When access to childcare limits parental employment, businesses cannot operate at full capacity, and overall economic growth slows.

COVID-19 Impacts and Recovery

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. The number of licensed childcare centers dropped from 2,093 in 2019 to 2,060 in 2020 and only recently recovered to its pre-COVID level.⁶ In comparison, the number of establishments across the U.S. continued to increase, although at a slower rate during 2020, before resuming its prior upward trend in 2021.

The loss of slots during the pandemic has meant that childcare has become even more expensive for families. As the economy re-opened post-COVID, the demand for childcare far outstripped demand with more than 16,000 income-eligible children on waitlists for care in Massachusetts as of February 2022.⁷ As a result, the average yearly tuition for infant care in Boston increased by about \$1,300 to \$21,269 per year between 2018 and 2021. The tuition hike for toddler care was even steeper, increasing by about \$5,600 to reach \$19,402 per year.

Despite this strong demand for childcare services post-pandemic, employment has recovered more slowly in the childcare industry and is still below that which would have occurred if it had continued its pre-pandemic upward trajectory. 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. This is despite a surge in childcare job postings between April 2020 and 2021 as the economy rapidly re-opened and parents returned to work.

Employment in the childcare industry has recovered more quickly in Massachusetts than in the U.S. There is a 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. The C3 grants were part of the \$39 billion in emergency funding to stabilize the childcare sector

⁴ Reardon, Sean, and Christopher Doss. 2018. [A Portrait of Educational Outcomes in California](#). *Getting Down to Facts II*. September, 2018.

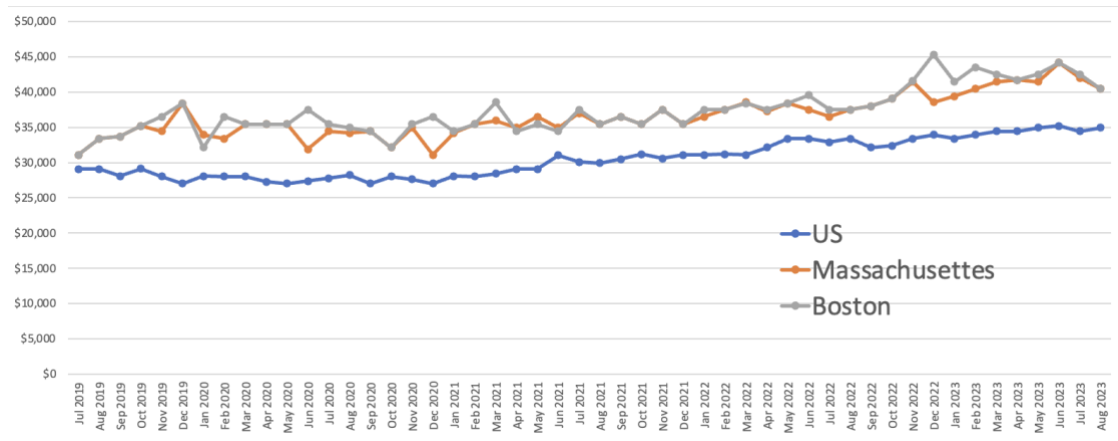
⁵ [Family Perspective COVID-19 Survey](#). *Strategies for Children*, 2020.

⁶ Reardon, Sean, and Christopher Doss. 2018.

⁷ [Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care: Board Meeting](#). Department of Early Education and Care, February 2022.

through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Figure 3 shows that advertised salaries for pre-school teachers, the top entry level job among childcare workers, increased in Massachusetts relative to the U.S. during 2022 and 2023, and even more so in Boston compared to the rest of the Commonwealth.

Figure 3. Advertised Salary Trend for Pre-School Teachers, 2019-2023



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from Lightcast, Inc.

However, ARPA was a short-term solution with federal subsidies that expired in September of 2023, jeopardizing 3 million childcare slots. Although Massachusetts continued to fund the subsidies for 2024, the future is unclear, and the amount paid to providers was reduced in May of 2024 to make the funding last through the fiscal year.⁸

Trends in Job Quality

The tight labor market has laid bare pre-existing concerns about job quality in the childcare industry and the ability of employers to attract workers and fill open positions. As recently as the spring of 2022, 35% of center-based childcare programs reported being unable to operate at full capacity.⁹

The ability for employers to increase job quality is limited by thin profit margins in the childcare industry, stemming from the highly regulated and labor-intensive nature of the job. Regulations that specify the ratio of teachers to children are designed to ensure a safe, loving, and developmentally appropriate environment, but that also means providers are highly dependent on the tuition paid by families. This source of revenue is often unstable due to families dipping in and out of care as they need compared to public schools where attendance is compulsory. Even for providers who accept childcare vouchers, reimbursement rates often

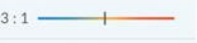
⁸ Gross, Samantha. [“With cuts to child-care grants looming, providers worry about future of program.”](#) *The Boston Globe*, April 7, 2024.

⁹ Campbell, Fernanda; Villarreal, P; Patil, P. [“\(Re\)Building Boston’s Early Education and Care Sector: Supply, Affordability and Quality Needed.”](#) *The Boston Opportunity Agenda*, May, 2023.

fail to account for a number of other factors, particularly those that have increased during COVID due to extra cleaning, less sharing of toys and other items, as well as sick days for staff.

As a result, even though employers are posting a record number of open childcare positions, employment still remains below projected demand, in part due to a lack of job quality. In Massachusetts, childcare employers have been posting two to four times as many job openings each year post-pandemic compared to 2019, yet it is taking even longer to fill those positions.

Table 1. 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.

In part this is because childcare employers are also competing with other service sector jobs that pay more, have better hours, offer a career ladder, and generally have a less taxing and more supportive work environment than childcare:

Wages Despite the stronger labor market demand for childcare workers, wages remain low. Average earnings for Massachusetts childcare workers were only \$22,768 per year as of 2022, well below state median income, especially for entry-level positions, such that upwards of half of workers in the childcare industry are eligible for public assistance, even prior to the pandemic.¹⁰

Benefits Although wages are a primary concern for childcare workers, the lack of comprehensive benefits in the industry is also an issue. Across the nation, while 52.2% of all workers have employer-sponsored health coverage, only 20.7% of childcare workers do. Retirement is also of concern, with 80% of center-based early educators consistently worried about savings for retirement in both 1989 and 2014.¹¹

¹⁰ Workman, Simon. 2018. [Where Does Your Childcare Dollar Go?](#) Center for American Progress. Feb, 2018.

¹¹ Whitebook, Marcy, Deborah Philipps, and Carolee Howes. [Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce in 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study](#) Center for the Study of Child Care Employment November 1, 2014.

Scheduling 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 appointments). Because childcare is an in-person job and providers must meet regulated teacher to child ratios, arranging schedules for time off to cover unexpected absences can be tricky. In addition, childcare centers are often open earlier and close later than other employers to allow parents to get to and from work for drop-off and pick-up. As a result, most childcare workers have limited vacation, work longer hours, and must often change their hours to cover when other workers are absent.

Career Ladder Excessive requirements for education and experience can create barriers for entry-level workers. In Massachusetts, a lower share of entry-level childcare job postings are open to workers with only a high school education or with no prior experience compared to jobs posted across the nation. In addition, professional growth for incumbent workers can be stymied by the need for completion of college level classes to advance in their careers. Providers in Massachusetts are more likely to require a Bachelor's or even a Master's degree, particularly for Childcare Directors, compared to U.S. employers. Yet, most of the skills listed on the postings for Childcare Director are things like leadership, customer service, operations and management—skills that can often be learned on the job or through acquiring a certification rather than a Bachelor's or advanced degree. In fact, looking at more specialized skills that are required across teacher and director job postings (e.g., preschool education, child development and lesson planning among the top qualifications) reveals a lot of overlap, suggesting that the educational requirements may pose a barrier that prevents some qualified workers from filling these more advanced positions and moving up in the childcare industry.

Supportive Environment Childcare labor is physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing work that requires a supportive environment with frequent breaks, cultural awareness, and opportunities for feedback and professional development. Childcare workers often simultaneously serve marginalized populations as well as represent the more vulnerable parts of the labor force. They are less likely to have a four-year 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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.

¹² Calculations using data from the 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Sample.

¹³ Banerjee, A; Elise, G; Marokey, S. [“Setting higher wages for child care and home health care workers is long overdue.”](#) *Economic Policy Institute*. November 18, 2021.

Analysis of the JQBI Pillar by Pillar

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 measure of job quality that can be used as a self-assessment for re-designing jobs across the five pillars. To assess how the JQBI was used by employers to improve job quality, the research team conducted a total of 20 interviews with employers and employees, representing 8 different job sites and analyzed the data across the two groups to compare themes pillar by pillar. Table 2 provides a summary of the interview takeaways and representative quotes across each pillar of the JQBI, comparing the perspectives of employers versus employees side-by-side.

Table 2. Qualitative Assessment of the JQBI by Pillar

A. Wages

Employers	Employees
Employers generally felt that the JQBI helped document and make visible what was already known about low company wage levels. However, managers used the JQBI ranking to advocate to their leadership for wage increases, which had a direct impact on their workers.	The importance of wages could not be overstated by employees, who were primarily women and mothers themselves, largely from low-income and potentially vulnerable populations. Although they appreciated the increases that they were seeing, respondents noted that these increases were often tied to achieving certifications and also felt that the wages being offered still did not entirely meet their needs for a living wage.
<i>“I wanted more data. I wanted us to be able to compare how we did compared 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.</i>	<i>“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</i>
<i>“...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</i>	<i>“So it was tied to the certification. Not everybody gets a raise after three months.” -Allison</i>
	<i>“They told me \$16.15 when I started... When I received the certificate to a teacher...? They [gave] me \$20 [per] hour.” -Mary</i>

B. Benefits

Employers	Employees
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, and made important changes in response to what they learned through the JQBI process. These changes were not limited to just medical and dental insurance, but also expanded to other benefits aimed at addressing some of the barriers that the childcare workforce faces such as mental health, transportation, English as a second language—and especially childcare.	Employees noted the expansion in benefits, including recent increases to paid time off, especially around the holidays, an often-overlooked benefit for childcare workers. However, they also noted that key benefits were still limited or missing, most notably retirement savings plans and comprehensive health insurance.

“...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

“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

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

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

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

C. Scheduling

Employers	Employees
Employers seemed fairly confident that they had the right policies in place for employee scheduling, while recognizing that due to the in-person nature of the work, and the need to be available to support working parents, the industry is less flexible than most.	Employee experiences in scheduling diverged from what managers reported, with some noting a lack of stable schedules or paid breaks. Often at least two weeks' notice was required for a day off which made it difficult to address their own childcare constraints.
“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.	“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
“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 for-profit childcare center	“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

D. Supportive Environment:

Employers	Employees
Most employers focused on more tangible aspects of a supportive work environment such as trainings, recognition for tenure, and teacher appreciation days. Fewer focused on less tangible things like feedback	Employees often wanted more support from their employers, both in recognition and resolving conflicts with peers. Some also mentioned a lack of interaction on the job, indicating the importance of creating a

and communication, and even then, it was admittedly with less intentionality than they would like.	sense of belonging goes beyond certificates and events.
<i>“...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.” -Executive at non-profit childcare center</i> <i>“...we have a staff survey that honestly had not been distributed like with fidelity over the years, but we did conduct one this year... our leadership team reviews it and makes goals based on it.” -Executive at non-profit childcare center</i> <i>“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.</i>	<i>“...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> <i>“[They] say good job. That's it.” -Mary</i> <i>“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> <i>“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</i>

E. Career Ladders:

Employers	Employees
Most employers recognized the limited career ladder in the childcare industry and tried to support their workers in obtaining additional education that would allow them to move up, gain more responsibility, and better pay. But they noted a number of challenges along the way.	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>“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” -Director of for-profit childcare center with multiple locations</i> <i>“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</i>	<i>“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... I cannot go to school because I don't have a time.” -Sally</i> <i>“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>

“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

“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.” -Allison

Assessing the JQBI Implementation Process

The employers interviewed expressed an appreciation for JVS Boston placement services and found value in the information that the JQBI provided.

Using JQBI Data to Improve Job Quality

The primary strength of the JQBI lies in the flexibility of the tool to measure job quality on multiple criteria. Employers largely knew which areas they would likely score lower, but they did not always know where they ranked relative to their peers. Using the five pillars of the JQBI, employers can see their rank across each category and understand where to focus their efforts.

Additionally, JVS Boston has strong relationships with its employer partners, bolstering its credibility and usage. Although employers used the information to confirm what they already suspected was true of their performance, they also actively used the JQBI as justification for improving job quality within their organization.

Finally, another strength of the JQBI was the power of industry information to motivate action intrinsically. Learning how they stacked up against their competitors motivated them to make changes without the need for “one size fits all” state regulation or oversight.

Recommendations for Expanding the Use of JQBI

Continuous Improvement 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. Three of the employers that were interviewed had pursued this strategy using the JQBI as a benchmark for their organization’s improvement over time. Given that JVS Boston invests in long-term relationships with their employer partners, there could be an opportunity to be more intentional about suggesting that employers take the survey annually going forward. Recently, a feature was added to the tool that allows JVS to send anniversary reminders for employers to update their answers.

More Disaggregated Data Another potential use of the JQBI is the ability to disaggregate the data to provide more “apples-to-apples” comparisons as well as more detailed reports. Centers within the childcare industry vary considerably, so employers often wanted to know how they compared to other organizations that were similar to them in terms of size, non-profit status, and program type (e.g., dual language). In addition, employers were eager for more detailed reporting, question by question, to understand the nuance behind their rankings. Although employers can request a more detailed report, it’s not currently the standard. In

addition, providing an industry level report that could be made available to the public might also foster shared learning across industry sectors.

Supervisor Involvement While the managers and directors that were interviewed all appreciate the need to improve job quality at their organization, employees noted that this was not always carried through to the adoption of supportive practices by their direct supervisors. Thus, there seems to be an opportunity to use the JQBI as an educational tool to create a more consistent company-wide culture by involving supervisors in answering the survey questions along with their managers.

Additional Pillars Given that JVS Boston is a trusted entity among their employer partners, the JQBI offers an opportunity to collect data on new or emerging aspects of job quality to inform best practices across the industry. For example, employees expressed an interest in skill growth opportunities outside of the formal career pathways that employers offered, but this is not fully captured by the JQBI survey. Adding a module of questions related to skill development as part of a new Skills JQBI pillar could help inform employers of the best means for offering more immediate and accessible ways for workers to grow within their current roles.

Table 3. Summary of Recommendations for Expanded Use of the JQBI

Area	Recommendation
Continuous Improvement	- 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. - 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.
More Disaggregated Data	- Provide employers with reports filtered by company size or non-profit status - Create reports for all employers with the same job title so that they have a sharper view of how they compare to the industry broadly. - Give employers free detailed reports so they can better understand the nuance behind their rankings in each of the five job quality pillar categories.
Supervisor Involvement	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.
Additional Pillars	- Capture the views of JVS Boston employee clients more systematically—either through a separate employee survey or series of interviews. - Verify the policies put in place and whether changes to job quality are actually making a meaningful difference for workers. - Compare the JQBI results across sectors to determine if there are best practices that can be applied from one industry to another.

Remaining Challenges Outside the Scope of the JQBI that are unique to the Child Care Sector

Benefits Cliffs While raising wages in the sector is a priority, there needs to be a strong commitment on the part of employers to achieve a living wage quickly lest employees face penalties associated with receiving public benefits. Roughly half of all childcare workers receive public benefits of some form. 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 financial resources (e.g., the so-called “benefits cliff”). Therefore, any wage increases would need to be large enough to offset the potential loss of public benefits—otherwise many childcare workers will just be treading water.

Sustainability Another challenge is ensuring that companies can sustain the improvements that they make in job quality, particularly when it comes to wages and benefits. As of September 30, 2023, states experienced a steep drop-off in federal childcare investment with 70,000 childcare programs projected to close nationwide without any intervention, leaving upwards of three million children without access to childcare.¹⁴ While Massachusetts has pledged to support the state’s C3 childcare sector grants through this year, budget restrictions have already resulted in providers seeing grant reductions in 2024. More than 98% of childcare providers in Boston have received money through this program, indicating the need for systems change that is fully funded. However, the wages trends in Figure 3 suggest that the JQBI may have had an independent effect separate from that of the C3 grants which could help sustain the wage gains made by employees beyond the viability of the grants.

JVS believes that addressing the childcare crisis is vitally important to the overall economy, including many of their clients who must have access to quality affordable childcare in order to enter the workforce. In JVS’ 3-year strategic plan, they will join a coalition of advocates seeking a resolution and pursue a 3-prong strategy of professionalizing the workforce through upskilling, paying adequate wages to attract and retain workers, and creating a pipeline of new workers by funding programs like JVS’s Early Childcare Educator training.

¹⁴ Kashen, Julia, Laura Valle-Gutierrez, Lea Woods, and Jessica Milli. [Child Care Cliff: 3.2 Million Children Likely to Lose Spots with End of Federal Funds](#). *The Century Foundation*. June 21, 2023.

Conclusion

Childcare is a physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing occupation that is also a critical piece of economic infrastructure, supporting both the upbringing of children and the ability of many parents to participate in the workforce. During the COVID-19 pandemic when many daycares were shut down, the childcare industry suffered large revenue and job losses, particularly in Massachusetts where restrictions were more stringent and in place for longer. In the post-pandemic recovery, employers are now posting a record number of open positions, but employment has been slow to recover and remains below projected demand. In part, this is due to workers having a wider range of job opportunities available to them, many of which offer greater job quality across all five of the JQBI pillars.

The findings from our research confirm that the JQBI developed by JVS Boston has both highlighted the importance of job quality and enabled employer partners to make positive improvements in some areas. Interviews revealed that employers have responded to the information provided by the JQBI by raising wages and expanding benefits, but they can only go so far in a highly regulated industry with thin profit margins. Additionally, the JQBI revealed that wages are also not the only priority of potential employees, who cite other less tangible areas of concern including scheduling difficulties, a less than supportive work environment, and a career ladder where workers need to invest heavily in formal education to get from one rung to the next.

The strong labor market coming out of the pandemic has shown to be remarkably persistent, creating an opportunity for JVS Boston to expand the use of the JQBI, serving as a diagnostic tool for other private sector employers, workforce development organizations, or even the state. Moreover, coupling the use of the JQBI with professional development, strategic planning, or even state efforts to better prepare early education workers would enhance the impact of the tool beyond simply providing information. 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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