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**Tennessee Bucking National Child Care Trend**

*Secret to Success Lies in Parental, Child Care Professional Support*

**CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (Dec. 2, 2024)** **–**While the nation grapples with a child care shortage, Tennessee is making strides in the other direction.

By the 2024 stats from the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), Tennessee has:

* Increased child care seats by 14%, adding 22,161 openings
* Started 201 new child care centers, with 2,322 all together
* Seen a 27% decrease in the number of counties identified as child care deserts, from 51 to 37

So, what is the volunteer state doing right? Some would point to a statewide network of partners working together to modernize the child care system. One of those partnerships is a close relationship between the TDHS and Chattanooga-based nonprofit Signal Centers.

“The state has seen positive advances this year due, in part, to coordinated efforts to improve quality, better communicate with families, and increase availability,” said Donna McConnico, CEO of Signal Centers. “We’ve focused energy on this front, as we know child care is an incredibly important piece of the economic success of all communities across the state.”

One part of the equation is Tennessee’s new Child Care Score Card. The critical decision of which child care to choose can be a difficult one for parents. That’s where the score card comes in as an easy-to-decipher tool for parents to evaluate child care options and make informed decisions.

Like a restaurant report card, the newly developed score card aims to quickly communicate child care quality to parents. These scores must be posted prominently inside each facility and can also be found through TDHS’ [child care locator website tool](https://onedhs.tn.gov/csp?id=tn_cc_prv_maps%20).

The brainchild of a 2-year listening tour, the score card was developed through research and feedback from child care providers and parents. Starting this past October, a new scorecard is released annually based on the average score from quarterly TDHS visits throughout the year.

Beyond helping parents navigate the system, TDHS also ensures child care centers and the professionals that work within them have what they need to provide the highest quality care. Alongside Signal Centers’ Tennessee Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R), training and resources are blanketed across all 95 counties in the state. The CCR&R team is a source of information, support, technical advice, and advocacy that supports the development and learning of all children.

In the same vein, TDHS works with Signal Centers to administer the Child Care WAGE$® Tennessee program. Through it, qualifying early childhood educators are rewarded with annual salary supplements based on education and continuity of care provided. This initiative is aimed at growing the workforce pipeline of early childhood professionals and retaining them after hire.

Five years in and $17 million has been distributed to more than 3,700 child care professionals. Addressing the key issues of under-education, poor compensation, and high turnover in the early childhood workforce has proven successful in the country’s only statewide program of its kind.

According to the most recent available data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the national turnover rate for child care centers is 43% for centers serving ages 0 to 5. Conversely, the current WAGE$ participant turnover rate sits at only 16%.

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**Signal Centers**

Signal Centers has been a cornerstone of the Chattanooga community since 1957. Its comprehensive early childhood education and disability services focus on fostering lifelong learning and independence for all. From one classroom of nine children with cerebral palsy to a statewide organization comprised of 13 distinct programs, the nonprofit’s mission of self-sufficiency remains unchanged. For more information, visit [signalcenters.org](https://signalcenters.org).