

## **OPINION, Velva Jenkins: How N.C. employers are investing in families**

**By Velva Jenkins | StarNews Media**

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This year marks the 25th anniversary of the federal Family Medical Leave Act, which, among other allowances, permits employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child. Since FMLA was enacted, the number of working families has increased dramatically, creating a greater demand for family-friendly workplace policies.

Supporting families cannot end after 12 weeks of leave. The lack of access to high quality, affordable child care is a challenge that begins when parents return to work and continues even when children are school age. Child care difficulties cause problems for employers, too, including worker absences, low morale, tardiness and lost productivity.

At Brunswick Community College's Workforce Development program -- where I work -- the average student is 43. Our students are in their prime working and child rearing years, and lack of childcare can make it nearly impossible to make the commitment to return to school and enhance their skills.

The good news is that North Carolina employers and employees recognize the benefits of family friendly workplaces. Recent interviews with more than 300 employers and surveys with 300 employees from small, medium and large businesses across a wide range of industries find a common belief that family-friendly policies not only are good for children and families, they are an effective strategy for retaining talent and growing successful businesses.

In fact, 71 percent of employers interviewed reported that family-friendly policies have a positive impact on their business, and almost half of North Carolina employers said they planned to offer more family-friendly benefits in 2018. Among employees, 94 percent say they believe family-friendly policies help attract talented workers and reduce turnover.

This research is part of a new initiative -- Family Forward NC -- of the N.C. Early Childhood Foundation, with founding sponsorship from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. The results were presented recently at N.C. State University's Institute for Emerging Issues Forum in Raleigh.

Some of the policies that support families and improve outcomes for children include flexible work schedules, subsidies for child care, onsite child care, family medical leave and babies-at-work programs. These business-led initiatives have positive outcomes for children, including

improved health and well-being. For businesses, these policies address absenteeism and employee turnover.

On the anniversary of the FMLA, it's exciting to see that North Carolina businesses are investing in their employees and the next generation of workers by creating more family-friendly workplaces that champion our children's future health, academic and career success.

Learn more at [buildthefoundation.org/FamilyForwardNC/](https://buildthefoundation.org/FamilyForwardNC/)

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