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**Family-friendly workplace policies**

**critical to community success**

Local nonprofit explains benefits to economy, productivity, and more

**GREENVILLE, NC —** The Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children is calling attention to the positive impact family-friendly workplace policies have on the greater community.

“For our communities to be successful, businesses and community leaders need to support families and parents through family-friendly policies, all the way from pregnancy to school age,” said Sharon Cooper, executive director of the Partnership. “Higher quality care for young children, supported by family-friendly workplace policies, is not only in the best interest of young children and families, but it also produces incredible benefits for businesses, including productivity, earnings, gender equality, business growth, brand equity, talent recruitment and retention, and improved employee health, engagement, and morale.”

Research shows that nearly 90 percent of brain development occurs during the first fire years of a child’s life, roughly the time between birth and the start of kindergarten. Creating family-friendly workplace policies helps parents bond with their babies during these critical years, when evidence tells us that proper nourishment, a stimulating environment, and emotional connections strengthen babies’ brains to give them the best start possible.

Family-friendly policies range from providing time and space for breastfeeding mothers, sufficient paid leave for parents and guardians, childcare and child grants, and flexible working arrangements. According to UNICEF, family-friendly policies create better educated children, increased workforce productivity, and greater employee motivation, happiness, and retention.

“Having a family-friendly workplace is important to me because my family is my number one importance,” said Kim Peele, regional infant/toddler specialist for the Partnership. “I feel like I am more productive with my work knowing that my agency supports not only me, but also my family and me caring for my family when needed.”

Several local businesses and agencies in Eastern North Carolina already have family-friendly policies already in place. One notable example is the Martin-Tyrrell-Washington District Health Department. The agency created its Infant-At-Work program to “encourage new mothers and fathers to return to work sooner by providing a positive work environment that recognizes parents’ responsibilities to their jobs and their infants by acknowledging that when an infant is able to stay with a parent, this benefits the family, the employer, and society.”

Over the last three years, seven infants have participated in the program, said MTW District Health Director and Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children board member Wes Gray. “This is a great project because it helps ease the transition back to work for our employees just coming off of maternity leave,” Gray explained. “It also promotes early childhood development including parent-infant bonding, breastfeeding, and safe sleeping practices for newborns.”

Kirsten Smith Beasley, health education supervisor and preparedness coordinator for the MTW District Health Department, said her decision to participate in the program had a tremendous impact on her and her son.

“As a new mom, participating in this program helped decrease my anxiety about returning to work and finding childcare, allowed me to continue breastfeeding and forming a bond with my son,” Beasley said. “I am so thankful for (the Infant-At-Work program) because without it, my transition back to work would have been much more stressful.”

According to the National Education Association, when children’s social, emotional, and academic development needs are met by their parents, the children are more likely to earn higher grades, have better social skills, and enroll in higher-level programs.

As an organization that works with families and young children, employees also recognize the significance of passing on the value of family-friendly work policies and their benefit to the families we serve.

“I feel that (sharing the benefit of family-friendly work practices) helps families realize how important their relationship with their children and other family members is,” said Laurie McPhillips, a parent educator for the Partnership’s Parents as Teachers program. “We are working with families and parents to support them in their parenting roles, and I think it’s only appropriate if we practice what we preach. If our Parents as Teachers’ families can see us interacting with our children and families, it gives us a direct opportunity to model these caregiving roles.”

When families and children thrive, their communities benefit as well. According to The First Five Years Fund, participation in high quality early childhood education programs show a 46% reduction in incarceration, a 33% reduction in rates of arrest for violent crimes, and a 26% reduction in the need for government assistance.

“The saying is true that it takes a village to raise a child,” said Cooper. “There’s no time like now to start making these investments in our children.”

Businesses and organizations interested in implementing family-friendly work policies can contact the Partnership for sample policies and additional information about programs already in place.

*The Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children is a Smart Start-affiliated 501(3)(c) non-profit that funds programs in early literacy, quality early child care and learning, assistance finding child care services, parent and family support, and health care in Martin and Pitt counties during the first 2,000 days of a child’s life.*