



Family-friendly workplaces benefit children, business

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This month marks the 25th anniversary of the federal Family Medical Leave Act, which, among other supports, allows employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child. Since FMLA passed, the number of working families has increased dramatically, creating a greater demand for family-friendly workplaces. Today, for married couples with children, 96.8 percent have at least one employed parent and 61.1 percent have both parents employed.

Recent interviews with more than 300 North Carolina employers and surveys with 300 employees from small, medium and large businesses across a wide range of industries show that employers and employees agree that family-friendly policies are not only good for children and families, they are an effective strategy for retaining talent and growing successful and competitive 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 responded that they planned to offer more family-friendly benefits in 2018. Among employees, 94 percent say they believe that family-friendly policies help attract talented workers and reduce employee turnover.

This research is part of a new initiative — Family Forward NC — of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation with founding sponsorship from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. These results were released earlier this month at NC State University's Institute to Emerging Issues Forum in Raleigh.

Some of the policies explored in the research include flexible work schedules, telecommuting, subsidies for child care, onsite child care, family medical leave, babies at work programs and paid maternity and paternity leave. These policies have positive outcomes for children including improved health, well-being and academic success. For businesses, these policies address problems such as absenteeism, lost productivity and employee turnover.

The survey results show that paid maternity and paternity leave are core benefits that are highly valued by employees. At Mayne Pharma in Greenville and Raleigh where I work in human resources, we offer up to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave and up to four weeks of paid parental leave for fathers, depending on the employee's tenure.

Like employers interviewed for NCECF's research, we see this policy as a win-win for employer and employee. Paid maternity and parental leave means better health and academic outcomes for children and higher job satisfaction for parents. For the employers it means new mothers are more likely to come back to work, new fathers are more likely to stay employed, and it improves morale and increases employee retention.

On the anniversary of the FMLA, it's encouraging to see that North Carolina businesses are investing in their employees and the next generation of workers by creating more family-friendly workplaces that support our children's future health, academic and career success. Our state is on the right track and the outlook for increasing family friendly workplaces over the next 25 years is strong. Be a part of it. Learn more and connect with Family Forward NC at: <http://buildthefoundation.org/FamilyForwardNC/>.

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