



WORKPLACE

## SET UP FOR SUCCESS: WHY FAIR SCHEDULES ARE CRITICAL FOR WORKING PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Millions of parents across the country work in jobs with low wages, challenging scheduling practices, and minimal benefits. Parents in the low-wage workforce often have unpredictable and unstable work schedules over which they have little control, which can wreak havoc on transportation and child care arrangements. Insufficient work hours, together with low wages, can also deprive parents of the income they need to provide for their children. **The challenging schedules of many low-wage jobs can leave parents struggling to arrange and afford the high-quality early care and education their children need to succeed in school and beyond.**

Highlighting the cross-generational impact of parents' working conditions on children's well-being has the potential to strengthen public support for policies, practices, and strategies that can make a real difference in working families' lives. Drawing the link between **fair scheduling practices** and children's success can help make the case for fair scheduling policies and practices.

**Data show how the schedules associated with many low-wage jobs can undermine working parents' ability to care for their children.**

- More than one in four low-wage workers have nonstandard work schedules. Low-wage industries like retail, food service and home health care often require work hours outside of 6 am to 6 pm on weekdays.
- Many parents working in low-wage jobs have unstable, unpredictable, and often inadequate hours, scheduled with little regard for their needs or preferences. A working parent scheduled for an "on-call" shift will find out just hours before

the shift whether she must actually report to work, and other "just-in-time" scheduling practices—often supported by scheduling software—can produce frequent, last-minute changes to scheduled shifts and work hours that vary widely from week to week.

- Among those who work in hourly jobs, almost three-quarters of young adults (ages 26 to 32)—a group that is particularly likely to have young children at home—report that their work hours fluctuate each month.
- Forty-one percent of young adults working in hourly jobs report knowing their work schedule one week or less in advance.
- About half of low-wage workers report having little or no control over the timing of their work hours.
- Parents who work part time are especially vulnerable to unfair scheduling practices. Part-time workers typically experience more variability in hours and receive even less advance notice of their schedules than full-time workers.
- In many low-wage jobs, even workers hired as full-time are not guaranteed a minimum number of hours. And "open availability" is often a precondition to full-time status, but only means that a worker must be available at any time—not that she will be scheduled accordingly.

**The often-challenging work schedules of low-wage jobs can increase parents'—and children's—stress, which can impair behavioral and cognitive outcomes for children.**

- When a parent never knows whether she will work 10 or 40 hours in a given week, and has no control over when those hours will be, it can be nearly impossible to budget for expenses, secure reliable child care, establish consistent routines at home, spend the time she wants with her children—or even regularly share a meal with them.
- Nonstandard schedules place increased stress on working parents—and have been linked to behavioral problems and



lower language ability, reading, and math performance in children. Unstable and unpredictable work schedules can similarly strain families.

- Young children of parents employed in low-wage jobs with nonstandard schedules and little control over their work may be especially at risk of poorer behavioral and cognitive outcomes.
- Nonstandard and volatile schedules make it more challenging for parents to access high-quality early care and education programs, few of which operate during early morning, evening, overnight, or weekend hours, or are able to accommodate a constantly shifting schedule. As a result, children of parents with low-wage jobs often lack opportunities to participate in high-quality early care and education programs that could help them gain the early math, language, literacy, social, emotional, and learning skills they need to enter school ready to succeed.

***Policies and strategies that improve low-wage working parents' schedules will also benefit their children.***

- **Provide greater employee input into work schedules.** When employers give employees a voice in their work schedules, by, for example, granting employee scheduling requests made so that employees can meet caregiving responsibilities (or other obligations outside of work) when no business reason prevents it, this helps lower working parents', and thus their children's, stress—and gives them more time to spend together as a family.
- **Provide advance notice of work schedules.** When employers provide workers with at least two weeks' notice of work schedules, working parents are better able to secure child care for their children and balance their work and caregiving responsibilities, which could ameliorate some of the stress experienced by parents and the behavioral and cognitive risks that exist for their children.

- **Discourage last-minute changes to scheduled shifts.** When employers avoid the use of on-call shifts, minimize disruptions to scheduled shifts and provide workers with additional compensation for on-call shifts, last-minute schedule changes, split shifts, and shifts from which they are sent home early, working parents are better able to manage last-minute changes to child care arrangements and minimize income loss that creates financial strains for their families.
- **Expand opportunities for part-time workers.** When employers guarantee a minimum number of weekly work hours, offer additional hours of work to existing part-time employees before hiring new employees, and ensure that part-time and full-time employees are treated equally with respect to rate of pay, benefits, and promotion opportunities, parents who work part time can gain more stable schedules and more opportunity to secure the pay and benefits they need to support their families.

When advocates for children and families collaborate with low-wage workers and their advocates, as well as with private sector representatives, they can craft promising two-generational policy solutions and strategies that hold real potential for supporting low-wage working parents and their children. **By working together, we can set families up for success.**

*For data, workers' stories, and all source information, see NWLC's report, **Set Up to Fail: When Low-Wage Work Undermines Parents' and Children's Success.***

*For detailed examples of fair scheduling policies, see NWLC's agenda for action, **Set Up for Success: Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children.***

