



SNOHOMISH COUNTY EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE REPORT



**BY THE EARLY LEARNING LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF SNOHOMISH COUNTY
JANUARY-JUNE 2025**

www.snohomishcountyearlylearningcoalition.org





Table of Contents

How To Read This Report.....	5
Letter from Co-Chairs of Early Learning Leadership Council of Snohomish County.....	6 - 7
Report-At-a-Glance.....	8
Section 1: Introduction and Purpose.....	9 - 11
• What is early learning and why does it matter	
• Why this report	
Section 2: Executive Summary.....	12 - 15
• What the data told us	
Section 3: 10 Key Highlights.....	16
• What stands out most	
Section 4: The Gaps in Early Education and Child Care: What We Heard.....	17 - 21
• What we heard: families' experiences	
• What we heard: providers' realities	
Section 5: Deeper Analysis in Snohomish County.....	22 - 25
• Questions from the Community	
Section 6: Intersectionality.....	26
• What do different identities (by families and providers) tell us when reviewed together?	
Section 7: Who Is In This Data?.....	27 - 30
• Demographic identities of families and providers	



Table of Contents

Section 8: The Data Collection Process.....	31 - 33
• Methodological Reflection (i.e., what went well this time?)	
• Suggestions for future data collection (i.e., where should we focus in the next data collection?)	
• Overview of data collection methods	
• Note on limitations of data collection and equity considerations	
Section 9: Recommendations and Next Steps.....	34 - 36
• Next steps the EL Council will advocate for with the community around	
Section 10: Acknowledgements.....	37
Section 11: Appendix.....	38 - 53
• 11.1. Quantitative Data - Charts and graphs from the survey	
• 11.2. Data Collection Tools	
◦ List of questions asked in the survey and focus groups	
Section 12: Where Do We Go From Here.....	54





How to Read This Report

This report presents a multi-perspective understanding of child care needs, challenges, and gaps in Snohomish County based on survey data from 496 respondents and seven focus groups with 25-30 people— including parents, guardians, and child care providers (providers). It includes both quantitative data (e.g., percentages, counts) and qualitative insights (e.g., themes from written responses).

To help you navigate, this report is divided into the following sections:

- Introduction: on why this report exists - (pages 9 to 11)
- Executive Summary: offers an overview of the themes we learned from the data - (pages 12 - 15)
- Key Highlights: bullets essential takeaways for quick reference by numbers and percentages - (page 16)
- Deeper Analysis and Key Findings in Snohomish County: offers disaggregated data where possible by family and provider type (FFN, home-based, centers etc.) and identity (race/ethnicity, immigrant status, gender, etc.) - (pages 17 to 25)
- Demographic Identity and Intersectionality: offers how intersecting identities impact access and vulnerability - (pages 26 to 30)
- Closing Notes: offers how we can update future iterations of this data collection - (pages 31 to 33)
- Recommendations and Next Steps: The Council has selected feasible next steps that will impact the Snohomish Early Learning community immediately and in the long term - (pages 34 to 36)
- Appendix: with charts and graphs that reflect actual survey responses; each chart caption summarizes the key insight - (pages 38 - 53)
- Where Do We Go From Here: how to get involved and be part of a growing movement - (pages 54)

Readers are encouraged to approach this report with a lens of equity and systems change, identifying how historical and structural barriers show up in both family and provider experiences.



Letter from the Early Learning Leadership Council of Snohomish County Co-Chairs

Dear Friends:

As co-chairs for the Early Learning Leadership Council of Snohomish County, it's been truly an honor to work towards a shared goal of ensuring that every family in our community has access to quality and affordable child care. Parents know that there is a shortage of providers in the area, but to truly dive deep and have a shared understanding of the reasons why, we have embarked on this journey together to hear from both families, providers, policymakers, and decision-makers. The goal is to ensure that our Early Learning Leadership Council is putting forward actionable recommendations that will definitely make a difference.

We are humbled to have the community so engaged in responding to surveys and participating in focus groups. The information gathered is the cornerstone to identifying gaps and opportunities for success. Identifying the root causes is what will propel us all to make change together because we will have a shared mission to work towards a shared goal. We recognize that just one of us working in a silo will not solve the issue at hand – it's going to take everyone working together for change.

As we approach this matter together as co-chairs, we were each struck by key takeaways. Co-Chair Dunn's biggest takeaway from the report was how evident it was that parents and providers want to be heard, as we could see that from nearly 500 responses from parents, which far exceeded our goal. By using our connections and outreach with a wide audience, we were able to hear from families that are often overlooked in the data. For example, 84% of respondents described some impact that childcare had on their work or finances, with 40% reducing working hours, others turning down job promotions, and even 20% having to quit their jobs. Without a quantitative survey, we wouldn't be able to hear from these parents to better understand our community's needs. The next steps will be critical to help alleviate these needs and voice concerns to decision-makers.

Co-Chair Pelissero's biggest takeaway was the extent of the "middle class" gap concerning child care affordability and eligibility for state subsidies. While understanding that this was a significant issue as a child care provider, the report's finding that 41% of respondents are ineligible for state assistance was quite staggering. This clearly demonstrates the financial strain experienced by the working middle class in our area when it comes to affording child care alongside the general cost of living.



Furthermore, the report indicated that 78% of families identify cost as the primary barrier to accessing child care. These two data points strongly correlate, suggesting that the lack of affordability forces many parents to seek alternative child care arrangements. At the same time, providers must charge tuition at a market value to adequately compensate teachers and fund quality educational programs. This highlights the significant financial pressures contributing to the child care crisis for both families and providers.

With this knowledge comes an opportunity for change.

No single person can make change on our own, but the hope lies in what we can do together. As co-chairs, we invite other people working in this space to join us in transforming this crisis into an opportunity. By working together across sectors, we can expand the availability of child care, support providers, and build the infrastructure families need to survive. If you are involved in any way, please join us in prioritizing the establishment of affordable and quality child care facilities through the funding, policy, and planning decisions. It's together that we will be able to make change. Our children, families, and community deserve nothing less.

We believe that meaningful change is not only possible – but with these findings it's within reach. This report outlines both the challenges we face and the opportunities ahead. It's our hope that it will inspire collaboration, inform action, and ignite the momentum needed to build a stronger and more equitable child care system for all.

The work starts now, and we remain hopeful for the future. Because when a community invests in its children, everyone thrives.

We look forward to you joining us on this journey.

Sincerely,
Megan and Jennifer

Megan Dunn is a Snohomish County Councilmember representing District 2 and lives in Everett, WA.

Jennifer Pelissero is the Executive Director of Close Reach Academy in Arlington and lives in Duvall, WA.



Report-at-a-Glance

Child Care in Snohomish County: What We Learned

From the Data Collection:

- 496 total survey responses: Parents/guardians (92%), Providers (8%). 7 focus groups with 25 to 30 people
- Inclusive of English and non-English speakers, immigrants, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, and families of children with complex needs

Families Shared That:

- Cost and lack of availability are the biggest childcare barriers
- Many rely on informal or family-based care due to access challenges
- 14% have children with complex needs, often facing compounded exclusion
- 20% are immigrants/refugees, and 28% are families with low income
- 11%+ identify as LGBTQIA2S+ identity families, highlighting the need for inclusive environments

Providers Shared That:

- Home-based and Family, Friends and Neighbors (FFN) care often serves the most marginalized families, yet operates with the least support
- Infant and toddler care providers face the greatest financial strain
- BIPOC- and immigrant-owned programs are more likely to report financial precarity and risk of closure
- Providers are deeply affected by a lack of systemic structural support and staffing shortages

Key Takeaways:

- Gaps are tied to identity – and solutions must be too
- Families want geographical and financial access, flexibility, and stability in care
- Providers need policy-level backing and sustainable investment
- There is no single fix – but there are many possible futures, and families and child care providers are ready to participate in the change.



Section 1: Introduction and Purpose

What is Early learning and Why does it matter?

Early learning encompasses the comprehensive development and education of children, particularly from birth to age five, a period marked by rapid brain growth and foundational learning. During these formative years, children form over a million new neural connections every second, underscoring the importance of positive early experiences in shaping cognitive, social, and emotional skills. The early learning ecosystem is a dynamic, interconnected network of individuals, institutions, and community resources that collectively support the developmental needs of children from birth through age five. This ecosystem encompasses a range of settings, including immediate family and caregivers, child care, preschools, ECEAP and Head Start programs, transitional kindergarten, libraries, museums, and informal care arrangements. It also involves various stakeholders such as parents, caregivers, educators, health professionals, and policymakers, all working collaboratively to foster environments conducive to learning and growth. A mixed delivery system—integrating various settings like child care, licensed centers, parenting at home, and informal care—ensures that children have access to diverse, high-quality learning opportunities tailored to their needs. The goal is to provide families with diverse, high-quality options that align with their needs and preferences. This collaborative approach not only fosters academic readiness but also promotes lifelong well-being, highlighting the significance of early learning in laying the groundwork for future success.

Why does this report matter?

This report reflects the reality of how families in Snohomish County access care and early education for their young children through a mixed delivery system. That means it includes a wide range of care options—informal care, self-care, care from unlicensed providers, family, friends, and neighbors, as well as licensed child care centers and home-based providers. While this report does not cover every aspect of early learning and care options, it acknowledges the spectrum of how families navigate care in their daily lives.

We intentionally use the term child care rather than mixed delivery system throughout this report, as it is the language most commonly used and understood by families, business leaders, the media, elected officials, and even some educators. However, we recognize that families often rely on multiple types of care and education across their child's early years.



This report aims to improve our mixed delivery system in Snohomish County. It is a call to strengthen and support the early education and mixed delivery ecosystem so that every child has the opportunity to thrive from birth. To truly make a difference, families and caregivers must lead advocacy efforts, supported by early learning and education professionals, businesses, and elected leaders.

This report is an invitation for families, community members, and partners to come together and build a stronger, more inclusive system of care and early education for every child in Snohomish County.

Why this report now?

The child care crisis in Snohomish County is well-documented but remains insufficiently addressed. With child care access reaching crisis levels – an estimated 80% of county residents live in an “extreme child care desert” with only 62 licensed slots per 100 children of working parents - decision-makers need solid data to drive solutions. Funding from state, federal, and philanthropic sources increasingly requires demonstrating need with an equity lens – so families can find safe, affordable, and reliable care.

The Snohomish County Early Learning Coalition (ELC) is a key component of the early childhood education infrastructure in Snohomish County, Washington. The Coalition has been in existence for 30 years, with a membership of over 130 organizational and individual members. In the 2024 Legislative session, the Coalition received state funds to establish a multi-sector Early Learning Leadership Council of Snohomish County (EL Council). This initiative aims to address structural and systemic changes within the childcare and mixed delivery ecosystem. Representative Julio Cortes of the 38th District championed the funding received.

An estimated 80% of county residents live in “extreme child care desert” with only 62 licensed slots per 100 children of working parents.

In December 2024, the ELC established a new advocacy arm of its organization, the Early Learning Leadership Council (EL Council), comprising 20 community leaders from diverse backgrounds, including K-12 leaders, community leaders, childcare providers, elected officials, tribal partners, business leaders, government representatives, and families and caregivers.



The EL Council's primary goal is to improve the quality of early childhood care and education, ensuring that every child in Snohomish County has access to the necessary resources for healthy development and academic success.

Desiring deeper knowledge about the gaps that exist beyond the known challenges (e.g., affordability for parents and fair compensation for childcare providers), the Early Learning Leadership Council (EL Council) decided to lead the development of a comprehensive local early education and care report in 2025.

The outcome of this report is to go beyond the challenges faced by both parents of 0–5-year-old children and child care providers (providers) in Snohomish County, as these groups navigate the current early learning landscape. More importantly, this report provides feasible recommendations to address the gaps and points to funding solutions that can guide us in how we can make improvements in our communities.

The EL Council is at a pivotal moment in its advocacy and direction. Unfortunately, at a time when the early learning ecosystem is most vulnerable to federal and state cuts, the 2025 Legislature did not continue funding this essential work. One of the challenges that many early learning organizations and child care providers face is inconsistent funding opportunities. This is a systemic issue that leaves state and local early learning communities vulnerable. The Snohomish County Early Learning Coalition (ELC) is actively collaborating with experts and partners to explore new avenues to fund its systems change work and provide relief to families, caregivers, and the early learning sector in Snohomish County.



Pictured: The EL Council and Coalition Steering Committee (this is a subset of those who attended the first Early Learning Community Event about our work on May 29th, 2025)



Section 2: Executive Summary

What the Data told us.

This report presents findings from a comprehensive survey of 496 respondents and seven focus groups (of 25-30 people), primarily parents and guardians (92%), alongside licensed and informal child care providers. (Find more details on the charts from this survey on pages 38 to 53). The results shed light on child care access, barriers, provider experiences, and family demographics in Snohomish County.

“There’s a big difference in subsidy rates across the county line. Same child, same work – but I get \$400 less.”

The focus groups were crucial in gaining a deeper understanding of the realities faced by parents and child care providers (providers) in Snohomish County. A parent shares, “We need full-time care that matches working hours. I start at 7 AM, but nothing opens until then, and I can’t be late every day.” Providers expressed the regional differences in support, “There’s a big difference in subsidy rates across the county line. Same child, same work – but I get \$400 less.”

Snohomish County’s early education and mixed delivery system reflects several layers of inequity that create real harm for families and child care providers. Middle-income families often fall through the cracks, relying on unstable, informal care due to a lack of affordability support. A misalignment between what’s funded and what families actually need creates more inaccessibility. Whether it's missed wages or hidden out-of-pocket expenses, both parents and providers face high costs of participation. Even when slots exist, they sometimes go unused due to barriers like confusing systems, limited outreach, and language gaps. Finally, the system’s focus on programming without adequate investment in infrastructure leaves providers without the tools or stability they need to thrive.



Whether it's missed wages or hidden out-of-pocket expenses, both parents and providers face high costs of participation.



From the data collected in this report we found:

- 165 families rely on family, friends, or neighbors for child care, and 143 manage child care by staying home, underscoring reliance on informal care due to affordability or availability gaps.
- Approximately 1 in 3 parents feel their child is not receiving high-quality early learning. A third of respondents answered “maybe” or “no,” indicating gaps in quality or alignment with expectations.
- Out of 448 responses, almost 40% had to switch child care at least once due to affordability/access within the past 3 years, confirming the instability caused by funding gaps.
- Multiple providers marked themselves as “woman-owned” or “BIPOC-led”—highlighting an opportunity for equity-based investment.



These gaps identified from this data reflect the need for flexible, equitable investments across this diverse ecosystem.



The insights from this report can be divided into 5 themes:

Insight #1- Families need better access to early education and parenting resources:

Families access child care through a mix of strategies. Informal care (36%) and self-managed arrangements (31%) are most common, surpassing use of licensed centers (28%). Families experiencing complex needs — particularly those with children with disabilities — are more likely to rely on informal arrangements or self-care, especially if they are low-income, BIPOC, or immigrant families.

Insight #2- Families are facing critical barriers to child care:

Cost is the predominant concern (78%), followed by location (52%) and availability (50%). Nearly 40% of families have switched providers in the past 1–3 years due to affordability or accessibility issues. These pressures are especially acute for families earning under \$75,000, LGBTQIA+ households, and families with children living with disabilities.



Insight #3- Families are navigating financial burdens to manage child care:

Only 20% of families reported using financial assistance. Among the rest, 41% are aware but ineligible due to income thresholds — the “middle-class gap” — while 31% are unaware of available support. This lack of awareness is especially common among immigrant and BIPOC families. Notably, 24% of families say their income disqualifies them for support, but they still struggle to afford care.



Insight #4- Providers are facing challenges in providing services:

Home-based and Family, Friends, and Neighbors (FFN) providers disproportionately report financial strain and difficulty reaching families. Providers who serve infants or children with disabilities are more likely to consider closure. BIPOC, immigrant, and women-owned providers reported a higher risk of burnout, and many serve the highest-need populations while operating with the least financial cushion.

Among providers (N=54), key challenges include:

- Low wages and turnover (52%)
- Limited funding access (62%)
- Difficulty retaining staff (42%)
- High rent/mortgage (40%)



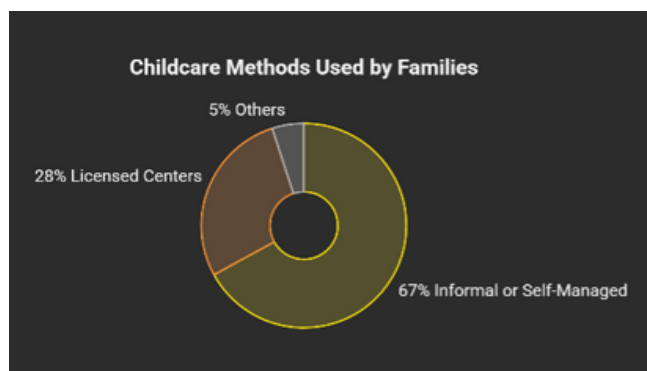
Insight #5- There are equity concerns in families, thus seeking more support:

Families with BIPOC identity, low income, and LGBTQIA2S+ identities report higher levels of discrimination from providers. These families also struggle more with access and affordability, as many fall into the eligibility gap or remain unaware of subsidies altogether.

Early learning professionals in Snohomish County are highly skilled and deeply dedicated, playing a critical role in children's development during their most formative years. Despite their extensive expertise and tireless work, they continue to face chronic underfunding, low wages, and a lack of systemic support—conditions that undermine both their well-being and the sustainability of the sector.

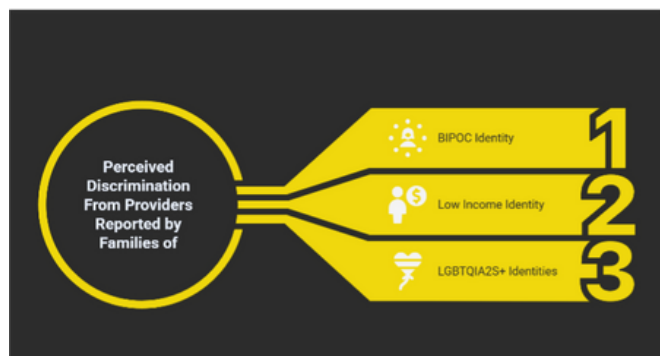
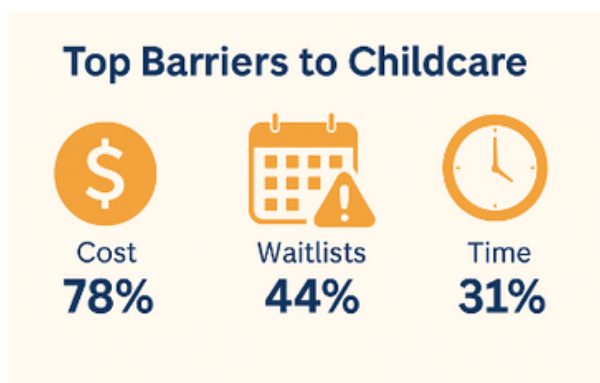


Section 3: Key Highlights by numbers & identities - What stands out the most?



1. 67% of families use informal or self-managed childcare, and 28% use licensed centers.
2. 14% of families have children with disabilities; of these, 41% are low-income and 53% are BIPOC.
3. Top barriers experienced by families include cost (78%), waitlists (44%), and non-matching hours (31%).

4. 24% of families earn too much to qualify for subsidies but still cannot afford care.
5. 31% of families are unaware of financial support programs — especially prevalent among immigrants.
6. 35% of providers are partially filled; 8% are struggling to enroll children.



“My teachers are burning out. One of my teachers came crying to me. We need more support.” —A child care provider

7. Family, Friends and Neighbors care (FFN) and home-based providers are particularly those owned by women (21%), BIPOC (31%), and people with disability (18%).
8. 39% of providers serve infants; these providers and those who serve toddlers (69%) are overrepresented among those considering closure in the past 12-24 months.
9. 33% of programs are woman-owned, 42% BIPOC-owned, and 27% disability-owned.
10. Families with BIPOC identity, low income, and LGBTQIA2S+ identities report higher levels of discrimination from providers.

“I had to quit my job because even with subsidies, I couldn’t afford childcare and rent at the same time.” —A parent of a 1-year-old



Section 4: The Gaps in Early Education and Child Care - What We Heard

Before sharing EL Council recommendations, we want to create a fuller and more detailed picture of the gaps identified during this project.

“Transitioning to a single parent household while unemployed and expected to split the cost of childcare with a difficult co-parent makes it more difficult to understand what resources are available to me.” –Parent



What we heard: families' experiences

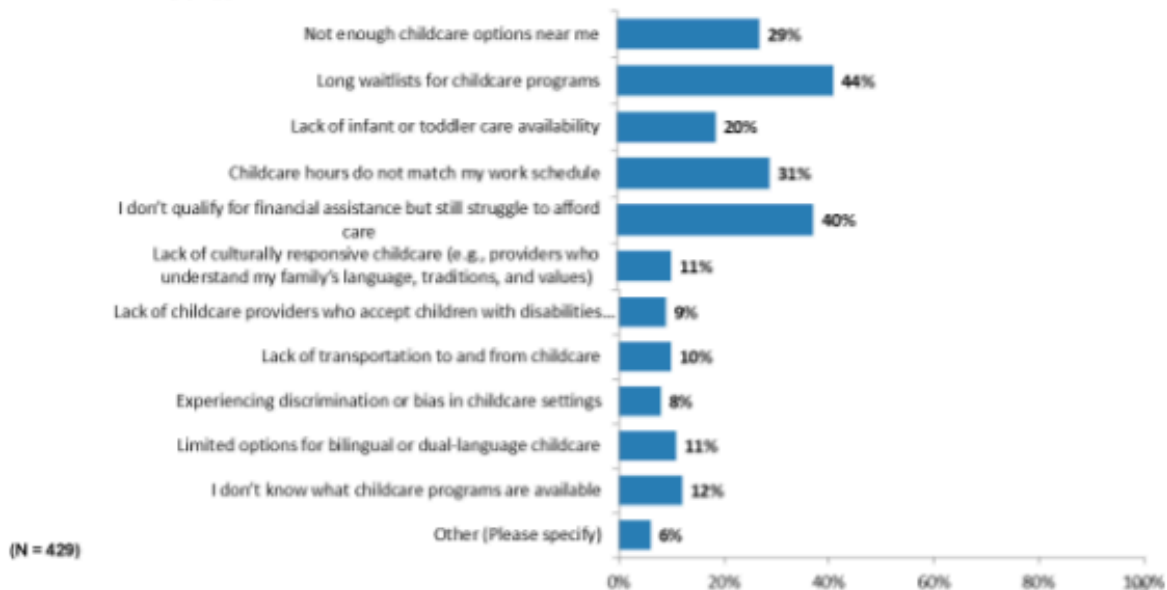
In conversations with families, a clear picture emerged of the challenges they face in accessing early education and care opportunities. High costs remain one of the most significant barriers, forcing many parents—particularly those with lower incomes—to piece together informal caregiving arrangements. These stopgap solutions often limit caregivers' ability to maintain stable employment or pursue career growth.

Beyond cost and availability, many families emphasized the importance of cultural and language relevance in care settings. Parents expressed a deep desire for their children to be seen, understood, and supported in ways that reflect their home languages, traditions, and behavioral norms. These insights point to a need for more affordable, inclusive, and culturally responsive early learning systems that walk alongside families, not ahead of them.



Biggest challenges to finding or using child care

What are the biggest challenges you face in finding or using childcare?
(Check all that apply)



**“My child is learning English, and the provider only speaks English. He comes home confused. We need bilingual spaces.”
– Parent**



Detailed challenges faced by families

Challenge	Details
Childcare is unaffordable and inaccessible, forcing career sacrifices.	Several parents shared that they either stay home or work reduced hours because the cost of care exceeds their income. This disproportionately impacts low-income and immigrant families with limited support systems.
Navigating childcare systems is confusing, especially for immigrants.	Parents noted difficulty finding clear, updated information about available childcare options, how to enroll, and what to expect. For non-English speakers, this challenge is compounded by language and unfamiliar processes.
Transportation and non-traditional hours are major barriers.	Limited bus access, lack of childcare near home or work, and centers closing before or after standard shifts all make it difficult for working parents, especially those in service or shift jobs—to access reliable care.
Trust, safety, and environment matter deeply.	Parents prioritize clean environments, low child-to-provider ratios, and culturally sensitive caregivers. While many expressed <u>appreciation</u> for their providers, they also noted frequent turnover, inconsistent communication, and a lack of culturally relevant programming.
Socialization and developmental growth are top priorities.	Parents want their children to learn how to interact with others, build social-emotional skills, and prepare for kindergarten in ways that reflect their child's learning style — not solely through formal instruction, but through play, exploration, and culturally responsive care.
Language access and cultural alignment are lacking.	Parents emphasized the need for providers who understand their culture and speak their language—or at least offer translated materials, culturally relevant learning, and meals that reflect diverse diets.
Word-of-mouth is still the most trusted system.	Parents rely on friends and community members far more than official websites or directories to find care

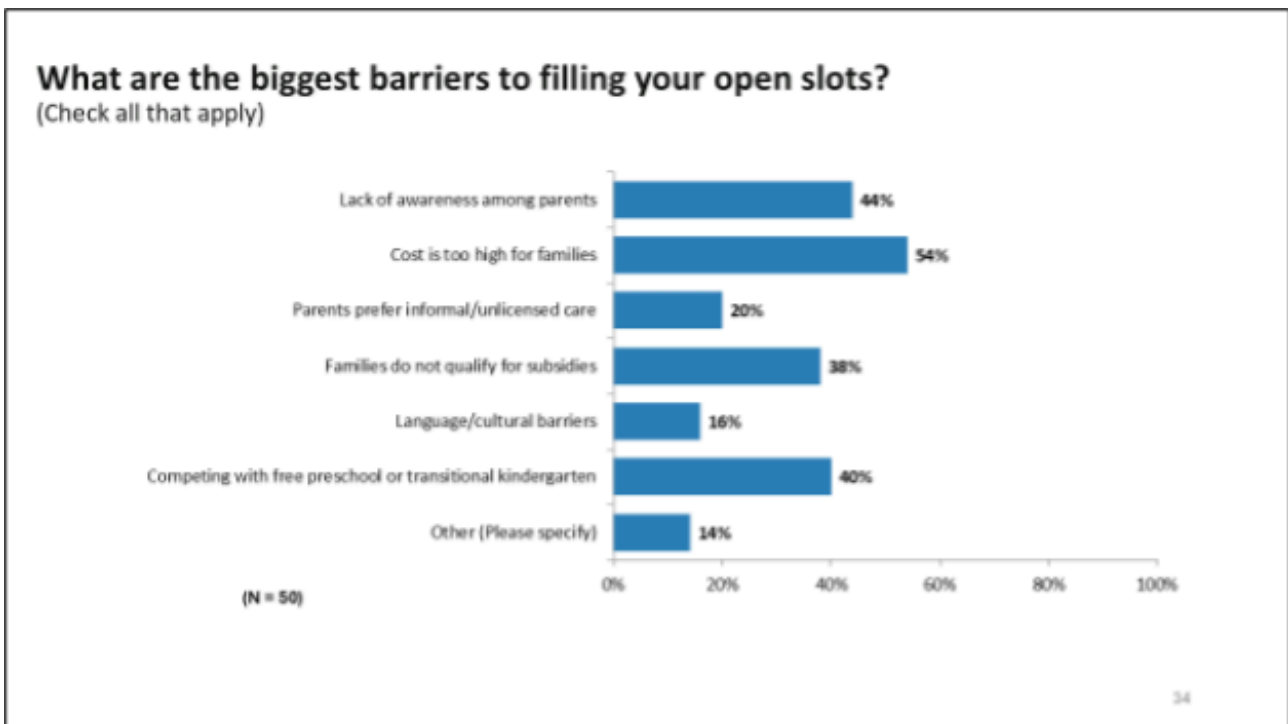


“The crisis in childcare is rooted in one undeniable truth: we do not pay our professionals what they’re worth. Despite being highly educated, experienced, and essential to child development, early childhood educators are among the lowest paid workers in the country. We expect them to meet rigorous licensing standards, follow ever-changing regulations, and support children with increasingly complex needs—yet we strip them of real leadership, decision-making power, and professional respect. Licensing systems too often dictate rather than empower, undervaluing the expertise already present in the field. To truly fix this broken system, we must start by paying educators a living wage, restoring their autonomy, and honoring their role as the skilled professionals they are.” —Childcare Provider

What we heard: childcare providers’ realities

Through our data collection, child care providers described a system under immense strain. Many spoke candidly about emotional exhaustion and burnout, often linked to staffing shortages, low wages, and the high emotional demands of the work. Licensing and regulatory requirements, while important for quality and safety, were also described as burdensome, especially for small or home-based providers with limited administrative support.

Across the sector, providers highlighted persistent gaps in infrastructure and access to capital, from inadequate physical space to the lack of funding needed for essential upgrades. Additionally, there is a growing need for more culturally responsive care, bilingual resources, and behavioral support—services many providers feel unequipped to offer without better training or system-level coordination.





Detailed challenges faced by childcare providers

Challenge	Details
Behavioral and developmental needs are outpacing support systems.	Providers across centers reported a sharp rise in children with trauma histories, behavioral challenges, and neurodiverse needs. Yet, they face limited access to specialists and mental health support—especially in Snohomish County compared to King County.
The licensing process is burdensome and inconsistent.	Especially for smaller or home-based providers, licensing requirements can be financially and logistically overwhelming. Inconsistent pay rates across counties (e.g., King vs. Snohomish) worsen inequities.
Providers are overwhelmed and under-supported.	Burnout is widespread, especially for teachers handling multi-age classrooms or working without enough peer support or behavioral expertise. Several educators shared tearful stories of feeling unable to meet kids' needs.
Low-income and immigrant families are underserved.	Providers who accept subsidies often care for children from immigrant families, many of whom face housing instability, job insecurity, and language barriers. Yet, those providers receive lower reimbursement rates and less structural support.
Many facilities are stuck in survival mode.	While some providers dream of expansion or improved programs, they're currently just trying to stay open—battling zoning delays, maintenance requirements (like chipped paint), and razor-thin budgets.
Unequal access to support networks creates disparities.	Providers in more affluent or connected areas have access to marketing help, behavior specialists, and volunteer engagement. Others are left to figure things out on their own or get minimal resources like a “binder.”
There is growing demand for culturally relevant care.	Providers highlighted that families want care environments that reflect their language, food preferences, and cultural norms—but many centers are not equipped to offer this yet.



Section 5: Deeper Analysis in Snohomish County

These questions came from audience members attending our May 29th, 2025 Early Learning Community Gathering event, where we shared preliminary findings from this report.

Q1. What are the pathways and barriers families of children with disabilities face in accessing child care, and how do these experiences vary by race, income, and other key demographics?

Answer:

Who they are (n ≈ 53 responses identified as “Family of a child with disabilities”)

- Race/Ethnicity:
 - 37 identified as White
 - 11 identified as Black/African American
 - Others include Hispanic/Latino (alone or in combination), Asian, Indigenous, and multiracial families
- Income:
 - 24% earn \$50,000–\$74,999
 - 21% earn under \$30,000
 - 15% earn \$30,000–\$49,999
 - Only 10% earn above \$150,000
- How they access child care:
 - Most common strategy: Staying home themselves (n=15), remote/part-time work (n=18), and FFN care (n=24)

Key Takeaways:

- Families of children with disabilities lean heavily on informal care or modified employment arrangements rather than formal licensed care—likely due to concerns around affordability, flexibility, and provider readiness to serve children with disabilities.
- A majority fall under low-to-middle income brackets, with few in higher income ranges—indicating cost and trust barriers — such as fear that providers won’t understand their child’s needs, lack of inclusive or culturally responsive environments, or previous negative experiences — may be contributing to the reliance on FFN care.
- While White families dominate numerically, this is consistent with overall demographic patterns in the dataset and Snohomish County. However, a disproportionate number of Black and Hispanic families appear in this subgroup relative to their overall representation. This warrants equity-focused attention in service and policy design.



Q2. What kind of providers have available child care slots? Is there a pattern with ownership and TK competition?

Answer:

Who has available child care slots (n = 22 identified providers)

- Types of Providers:
 - 23% are Licensed Home-Based Providers
 - 68% are Licensed Centers
 - Smaller proportions are FFN care, nanny/babysitter, or unlicensed providers
- Ownership demographics of providers with available child care slots:
 - 31% are BIPOC-owned
 - 31% are Woman-owned
 - 18% are Immigrant-owned
 - 14% are Disability-owned
- Populations these providers serve primarily include families who are:
 - Low income
 - Immigrant
 - With children who have disabilities
 - With limited English proficiency
- Perceived competition with TK:
 - 18% of providers with available child care slots cited “Competition from Transitional Kindergarten” as a major challenge

Key Takeaways:

- Providers with the available slots are impacted by family access limitations (e.g., affordability, awareness).
- Providers with underrepresented identities (BIPOC, disability, immigrant) are overrepresented among those with vacancies.
- Competition from TK isn’t the top barrier, but it does affect nearly 1 in 5 of these providers. Intersectionality + capacity struggles could worsen without support.
- Families with historically marginalized identities need more support to find and access childcare provider services.
- The three most significant barriers for providers are:
 1. Costs are too high for families
 2. Families do not qualify for subsidies
 3. Competing with free preschool or transitional kindergarten



Q3. What are the biggest challenges by provider Type (home-based, FFN, unlicensed, center-Based)

Answer:

- Licensed Home-Based Providers (n ≈ 22):
 - Low staff wages
 - Limited access to grants and funding
 - High rent/mortgage costs
 - Hiring/retention issues
 - Licensing/compliance costs
- Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Providers (n ≈ 12):
 - Low wages
 - Limited grant access
 - Facility-related expenses
 - Competition from TK
- Unlicensed Providers (n ≈ 19)::
 - Funding access (most cited)
 - Licensing and compliance costs (especially notable for unlicensed!)
 - Retention challenges
 - Not enough demand from families
- Licensed Centers (n ≈ 23):
 - Limited access to grants/funding
 - Difficulty hiring and retaining staff
 - Low subsidy reimbursement rates
 - Facility expenses

Key Takeaways:

- Grant access is the top universal challenge across all types.
- Home-based and center-based providers face more structural business costs (rent, wages). In contrast, FFN and unlicensed providers may face unrecognized or informal challenges — such as juggling caregiving with other jobs, lack of access to business supports or professional networks, or not knowing how to navigate grant systems — that are often not captured in traditional surveys or funding programs.
- Most providers — regardless of type — struggle with wages and staffing.



Q4. Which providers are most at risk of closure? Can we see this disaggregated by Identity?

Answer:

- From the providers who reported either:
 - Considering closure/reducing services due to financial strain, staffing, or regulatory barriers
 - Currently struggling to sustain operations
- Identity Demographics of At-Risk Providers (n ≈ 22):
 - 31% of at-risk providers are BIPOC-owned
 - 1 in 3 are both BIPOC and immigrant-owned
 - Several are multiply marginalized, including:
 - BIPOC + Immigrant + Disability-owned (n=7)
 - BIPOC + LGBTQIA2S+ + Disability-owned (n=3)
- Only 2 providers who reported being “none of the above” identities were at risk

Key Takeaways:

- Providers with intersecting marginalized identities are disproportionately represented in the at-risk group. BIPOC, immigrant, LGBTQIA2S+, and disability-owned providers need urgent financial and structural support to avoid closure.
- These findings support identity-informed interventions in policy and funding.





Section 6: Intersectionality

What do different identities (by families and providers) tell us when reviewed together?

Parents and Families:

- **Income + Identity:** Families earning <\$75K/year are overrepresented among BIPOC, immigrant, LGBTQIA2S+, and kids with disability households. These groups also face greater ineligibility for subsidies despite financial strain.
- **Access Challenges:** LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC parents report greater difficulty accessing culturally safe, flexible, and affordable childcare. Immigrant families are more likely to rely on informal care.
- **Complex Needs:** Families with children with disabilities are 1.7x more likely to rely on informal arrangements and 2x more likely to cite affordability as a barrier.

Child Care Providers:

- **Risk of Closure:** Providers who serve infants and toddlers are more likely to report financial instability. 21% of all providers considered closure, with higher risk among BIPOC and immigrant-owned programs.
- **Workforce Demographics:** Among providers:
 - 42% are BIPOC-owned
 - 33% are women-owned
 - 27% are disability-owned (operated by a person with disability)
 - 10% LGBTQIA2S+ owned
- **Vacancy Patterns:** Providers with available child slots are disproportionately FFN or home-based, particularly those serving children with disabilities or from limited-English households. While licensed centers account for the highest number of providers with vacant slots (68%), analysis by identity and provider type shows that FFN and home-based providers experience a higher rate of vacancies relative to their own group size. These providers, especially those serving children with disabilities or multilingual families, are disproportionately affected. This points to deeper access challenges and capacity barriers, even if the total number of vacant FFN/home-based slots is smaller.
- **Equity-Focused Support Needed:** These identity-based providers serve higher-need families but often lack resources for operational sustainability. Investments in these providers would bolster community-wide access and equity.



Section 7: Who is in this data?

Demographic Identities of Parents and Families:

Income Diversity:

- Respondents spanned the income spectrum. A significant portion of families reported incomes under \$75,000 (43%), including 15% earning under \$25,000 annually, indicating a high level of financial vulnerability.

Language at Home:

- While English was the dominant home language, several families reported speaking Spanish, Vietnamese, and other non-English languages, suggesting a need for multilingual resources in early learning and subsidy communication.

LGBTQIA2S+ Households:

- About 11% of families identified as LGBTQIA+, highlighting the importance of inclusive, affirming provider practices and non-discriminatory childcare spaces.

Immigrant and Refugee Families:

- 20% of respondents self-identified as immigrants or refugees, pointing to the importance of culturally relevant outreach and the need for clear, translated guidance on subsidy eligibility and provider options.

Families with Children with Disabilities or Complex Needs:

- 14% of families reported having children with complex or special needs. These families were more likely to report using informal care arrangements, struggling with access to specialized providers, and expressing concerns about discrimination or lack of support.

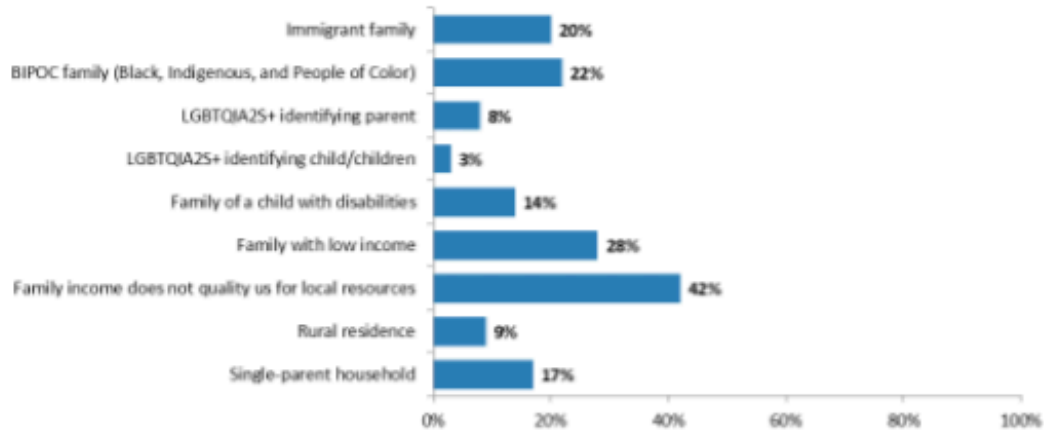




Below are three charts (find all charts on pages 38-53), specifically around family identity:

Does your family identify with any of the following groups?

(Check all that apply)

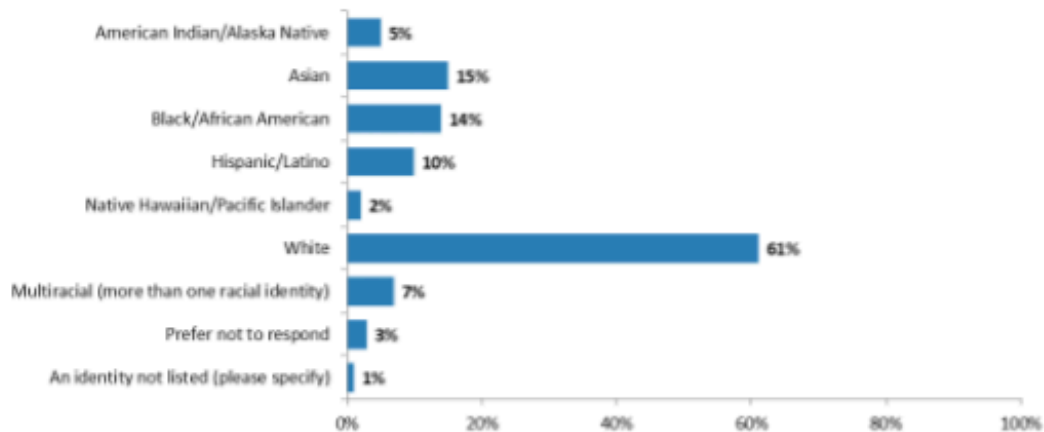


(N = 392)

25

What is your racial/ethnic identity?

(Check all that apply)

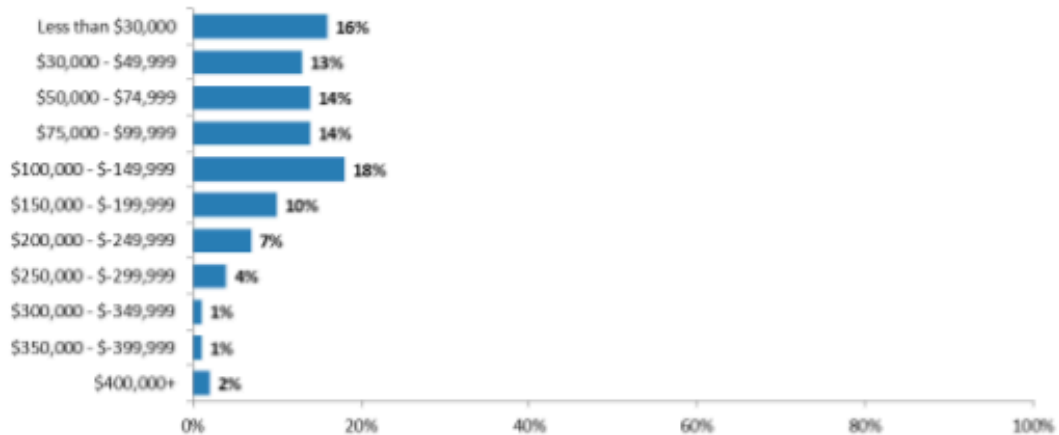


(N = 451)

26



Which category best describes your annual household income?



(N = 435)

28

Demographic Identities of Providers:

Types of Providers:

- A diverse mix was represented, including licensed centers, licensed home-based providers, and FFN (Family, Friend, and Neighbor) care. Tribal-affiliated and informal/unlicensed providers were also present in smaller numbers.

Provider Ownership:

- 42% identified BIPOC-owned or operated programs.
- 33% of respondents indicated their programs were woman-owned.

Languages Spoken:

- Many providers operated in English-dominant settings, but multilingual care was available, especially among home-based and FFN providers. This supports the cultural and language diversity of the families they serve.

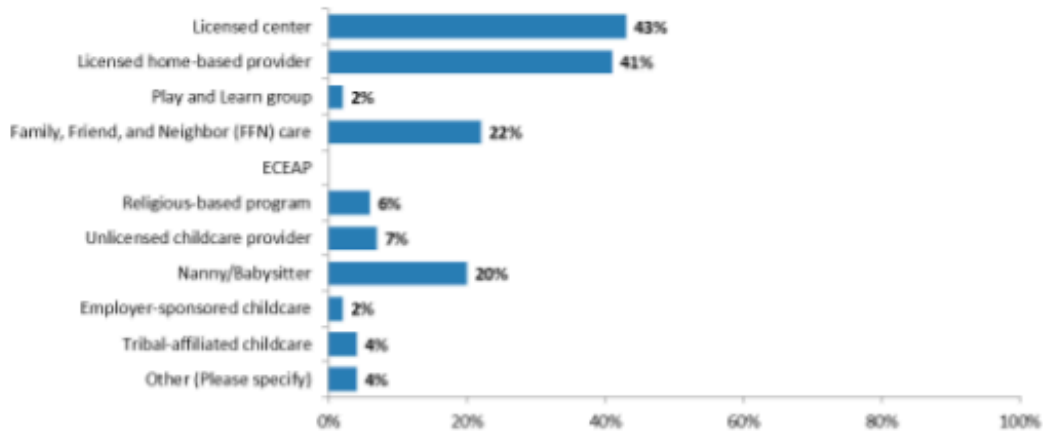
Age Groups Served:

- 39% of providers serve infants (0-12 months) — a high-cost group with often lower capacity, placing these providers at greater financial risk. Almost 60% of providers serve school-age children (5+ years), often through wraparound care models.



What type of childcare provider are you?

(Check all that apply)

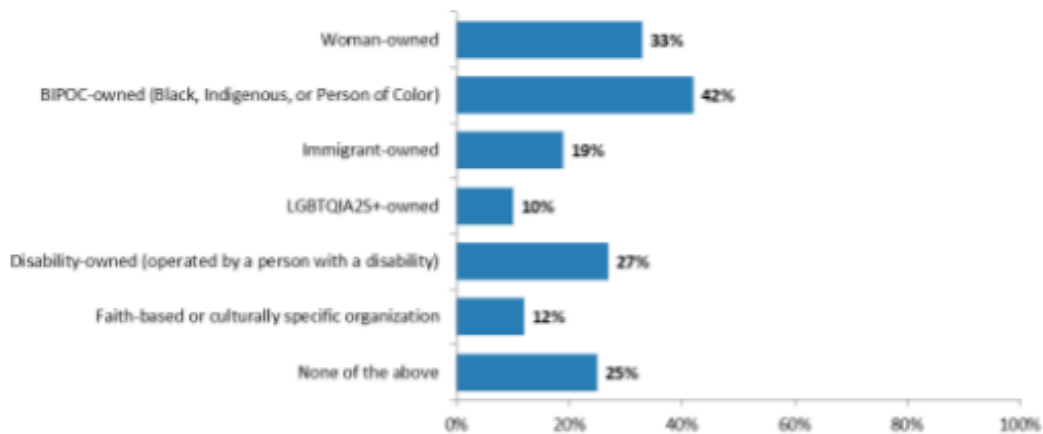


(N = 54)

29

Does your childcare program identify as being owned, co-owned, or operated by any of the following?

(Check all that apply)



(N = 52)

40



Section 8: The Data collection process

This report was built on values of inclusivity, dignity, and equity. From question design to outreach and analysis, it centered the voices and lived experiences of those often left out of child care policy: low-income families, informal providers, immigrants, and people with complex identities.

What worked well

- Mixed methods: Combining quantitative survey data with open-ended comments allowed for both scale and depth
- Multi-channel outreach: Leveraging community partners helped reach underrepresented respondents
- Language and accessibility: Offering questions in multiple languages supported more inclusive participation
- Multiple forms of outreach: Combining outreach methods of social media, community trusted partners, and one-on-one outreach led to a greater diversity of participants

Suggestions for future data collection

Several of the following strategies were identified as valuable extensions of this research and reflect both community needs and field-wide conversations. While not all could be fully implemented within the current project window, they represent important opportunities for future learning, design, and investment:

- Include data on the actual cost of care, current family payments, workforce employees most affected, and perceptions of affordability. Existing survey data includes rich insights around household income and identity needs that could be more directly surfaced in future communications when we ask for actual costs of care in proportion to their income.
- Broaden data strategies to include more informal childcare providers. Although we heard from some Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers, the numbers were modest relative to their presence in the community. Focus group comments suggest these providers often operate below the radar, without formal affiliations, making engagement more relational and time-intensive. Future efforts could partner with cultural hubs or faith-based institutions to reach them more deeply.
- Add provider-facing questions on burnout, access to professional development, and capacity to support children with complex needs. These themes emerged strongly in focus groups and could shape future survey instruments or follow-up qualitative studies.
- Expand survey language offerings beyond English and Spanish. While this intention was included in the design, the short timeline limited the ability to implement translations in a way that was thoughtful and community-informed.



Overview of data collection methods

The data collection mixed-methods approach in this project is designed to tackle specific challenges in our early education and care system.



The following “data beliefs” in the project are centered throughout this data collection, analysis, and interpretation:

- Data is collective power. It should illuminate the realities of those who are least represented.
- Privacy of those living in the data is non-negotiable. It should respect the community trust earned through transparency.
- Human voices lead design. All data collection tools are created with and for communities.
- Collective feedback is strength. All data collection tools are revised with feedback and Early Learning Council guidance.
- Equity is not an add-on. It is the fundamental principle embedded in question design, analysis, and interpretation.



Note on limitations of data collection & equity considerations

- This report reflects available data from majority licensed child care providers, with an opportunity to hear from more informal and unlicensed providers who often face significant barriers to licensure. As a result, we recognize that important perspectives from under-resourced caregivers and community-based programs may need to be a continued priority for future data collection. For example, license-exempt settings can include nature-based programs, Montessori models, and care offerings under four hours. These diverse settings meet different community needs and often reflect cultural, developmental, or geographic considerations. Our recommendations – now and in the future – must recognize and respect this ecosystem, and aim to expand equitable support across all models. That is how we can elevate and incorporate more of these voices in current and future advocacy.
- It is important to acknowledge that no research or report is ever fully complete. As new voices are heard, circumstances evolve, and systems shift, our understanding must continue to grow alongside them. Ongoing reflection, learning, and adaptation are essential to ensuring that insights remain relevant and responsive to the communities they are intended to serve.
- Our commitment to equity-driven systems change is ongoing and encourages collective advocacy from the community. Applying a social equity lens to this work means not only pursuing inclusive data collection practices, but also explicitly naming and addressing the harm that persist when inequities remain unchallenged.





Section 9: Recommendations and next steps from the Early Learning Leadership Council

We present these recommendations as a starting point to increase family access to care, support providers, and improve capacity to provide culturally relevant care that better meets the diverse needs of children and their families in Snohomish County.

The Early Learning Leadership Council has prioritized the following recommendations based on the data collected from our June 2025 study.

Providers Recommendations 1-4:

Planning Navigators (1)

Collaborate with Snohomish County to support individuals starting a child care business to understand and meet the permitting requirements. Ideally, this would be a professional who could support child care providers in successfully navigating county permitting processes. **Mid-Term**

Trusted Provider Navigators (2)

Initiate child care navigators from trusted communities to help with licensing, state requirements, building a business, and other provider issues. The Early Learning Leadership Council will explore and support existing and new funding sources to fund this project. **Mid-Term**

Peer Provider Mentorship (3)

Facilitate connections among providers during the licensing process. This will create opportunities for new providers to connect with experienced ones, fostering valuable relationships and a sense of community. Currently, a lack of connection hinders the sharing of resources and collaborative problem-solving that would strengthen the early childhood education ecosystem in Snohomish County. **Mid-Term**

Provider Mental Health (4)

Enhance support for providers caring for children with complex Needs. There's a significant gap between the needs of children in our community and the resources available to providers. The current support from DCYF, primarily suggesting an increase in staffing, doesn't address the financial limitations and the specialized knowledge required. The Early Learning Leadership Council will explore ways to foster stronger connections among childcare providers, specialists, and therapists. This multidisciplinary approach would improve training and provide valuable modeling for teachers. **Mid-Term**



Family Recommendations 1-2:

Family Trusted Messenger (1)

Initiate a program where trusted community members serve as messengers to parents, families, and guardians regarding available child care slots and other early childhood education resources. Trusted messengers from community-led organizations can help families navigate the Working Connections funding. Combine this strategy with an educational campaign to reach underserved families (BIPOC, immigrant, LGBTQ+). The EL Council will explore existing models such as the Snohomish County Health Department Community Navigator Program.

Short/Mid-Term

Education with Complex Needs (2)

Enhance pre-service education to include instruction on caring for children with special needs, neurodiversity, and cultural needs, thereby increasing placement opportunities for a broader range of children. Provide education for families on how to articulate and advocate for their children's needs (this could be part of the Family Trusted Messenger program). Classes for providers could be community-led, and the Early Learning Leadership Council will explore collaborating with partners, such as the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC), to ensure that providers receive Statewide Training and Registry System (STARS) credits. Community-led classes will also provide families with tools and resources to address complex needs, emphasizing cultural competency.

Short/Mid-Term

Funding Recommendations 1&2:

Endowment Early Learning Fund (1)

Create an endowment early learning fund as a pilot program. The Early Learning Leadership Council will explore working with partners such as the Community Foundation of Snohomish County. The EL Council would set the direction on what is funded in Snohomish County based on the findings/recommendations from this report. This model is a state model that has been successfully utilized in Nebraska. **Short/Mid-Term**



Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) Funds (2)

Request that Snohomish County conduct a community process to review the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account funding and make recommendations for best practices to ensure investments focus on community-driven strategies. **Short/Mid-Term**

The Early Learning Leadership Council will explore creating a central platform to facilitate connections among providers and between families and providers, making relevant information readily accessible and available. This could serve as a local hub for providers and families, as well as a platform to foster community among professional sectors working with children in Snohomish County. The EL Council is exploring collaboration with other partners, such as organizations that are part of our Coalition and Council.

The Early Learning Leadership Council overall supports the advocacy for thriving wages for all early learning educators and fully funding early childhood education in Washington State. These recommendations are a first step towards a more equitable system.





Section 10: Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to the many partners and supporters of the Snohomish County Early Learning Coalition (ELC), whose collaboration made this research and shared learning possible.

Thank you to the Members of the Early Learning Leadership Council of Snohomish County, who determined the report's focus, helped with question design, data collection, report editing, and the creation of the recommendations:

Co-Chairs Snohomish County Councilmember Megan Dunn and Jennifer Pelissero from Close Reach Academy, Charlotte Murray, School Board Director, Stanwood/ Camano School District and Executive Treasurer of Snohomish County Labor Council, Dan Chaplik, Superintendent of Sultan School District, Diane Krieg, from Stilly Valley Chamber of Commerce, Lacey Harper from Snohomish County Executive Office, Stephanie Sarantos, from Well Being Family Resource Center, Tanya Laskelle from Center for Human Services, Rosario Reyes from Latino Education Training Institute, Mary Cline-Stively from ChildStrive, Anna Gibson from Sherwood Community Services, Hannah Meier, parent from South Snohomish County, Jill McDaniels from Providence Boyden Family Autism Center, Deborah Brandi, from Foundation for Edmonds School District, Heather Thompson from Mar and Sol Mental Health Services, Pa Ousman Joof, from Washington West African Center, and Kristen Bowler Marere from Opportunity Council.

We want to thank our Research/Evaluator Consultant, Meena Das, from Namaste Data, and the staff of the Snohomish County Early Learning Coalition: Debbie Carlsen (Director), Mary Hsu (Executive Assistant), and Emily Felix (Communication Specialist). We want to thank our partners, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and Companis. We would like to thank all the partners who helped with additional outreach to families and providers in Snohomish County, including Volunteers of America, Edmonds Food Bank, United Way Snohomish County, Schools Out Washington, YWCA Seattle, King and Snohomish, Snohomish County Health Department, Snohomish County Human Services Department, and many others.

The work of advancing early education and care in Snohomish County is made stronger by this collective effort. From local child care providers and community leaders to public officials and family advocates, each partner plays a critical role in shaping equitable, high-quality early childhood systems. Together, the Early Learning Leadership Council continues to champion policies and investments at both the state and local levels, working to ensure that every child and family in our community has access to the opportunities they deserve.

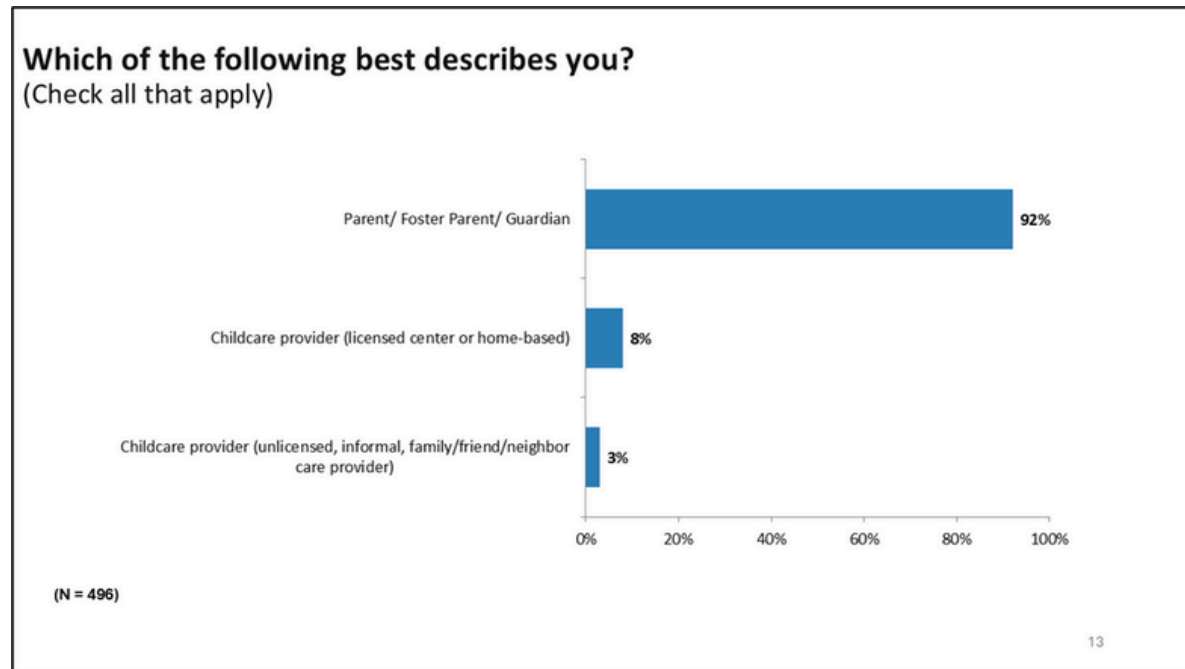


Section 11: Appendix

11.1. Quantitative Data from the Survey

Which of the following best describes you?

Summary of chart: The vast majority of respondents (92%) identified as parents or guardians, with very few identifying as either licensed (8%) or informal (3%) childcare providers. This indicates the survey primarily captured family perspectives.



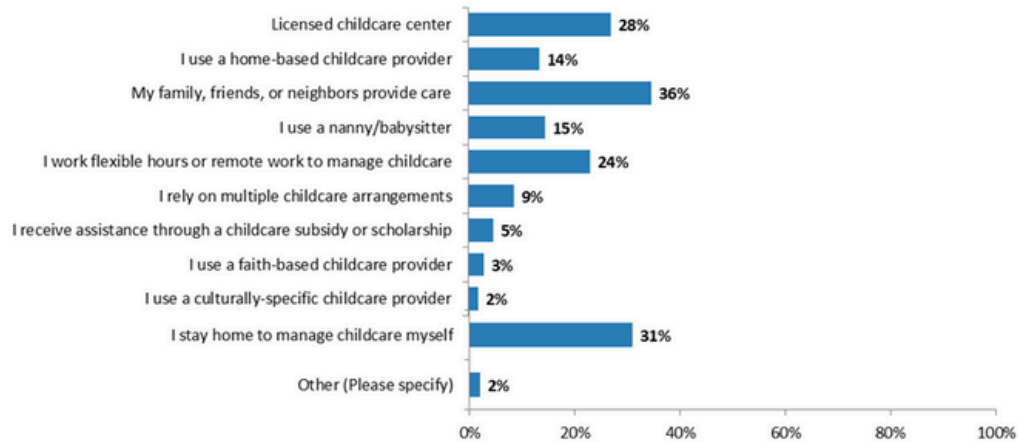


How do you currently manage childcare?

Summary of chart: Families manage childcare through a mix of strategies, with many relying on informal care (36%) and self-management (31%). Only 28% use licensed childcare centers, highlighting affordability and access issues.

How do you currently manage childcare?

(Check all that apply)



(N = 455)

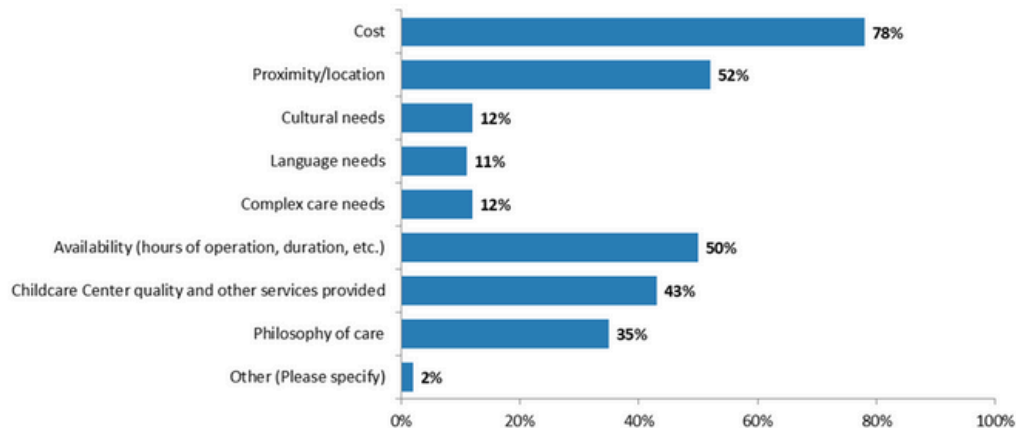
14

What factors influence your childcare choice the most?

Summary of chart: Cost is the top deciding factor (78%), followed by proximity (52%) and availability (50%). Cultural and language needs are much lower in priority, possibly due to lack of accessible culturally responsive care.

What factors influence your childcare choice the most?

(Check all that apply)



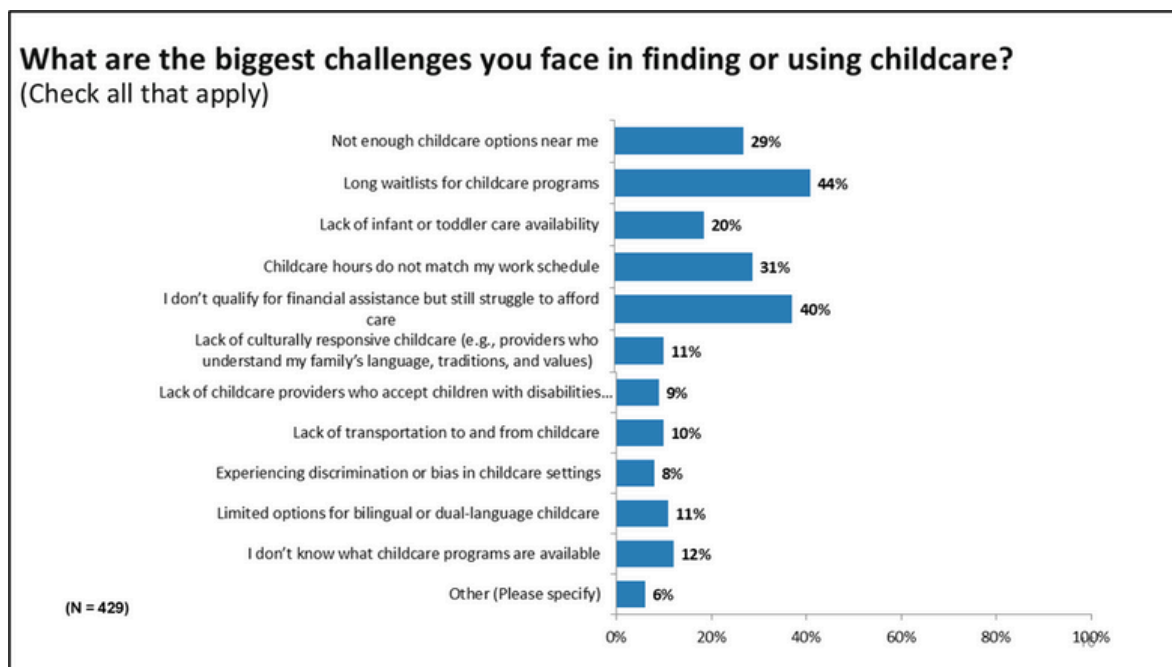
(N = 449)

15



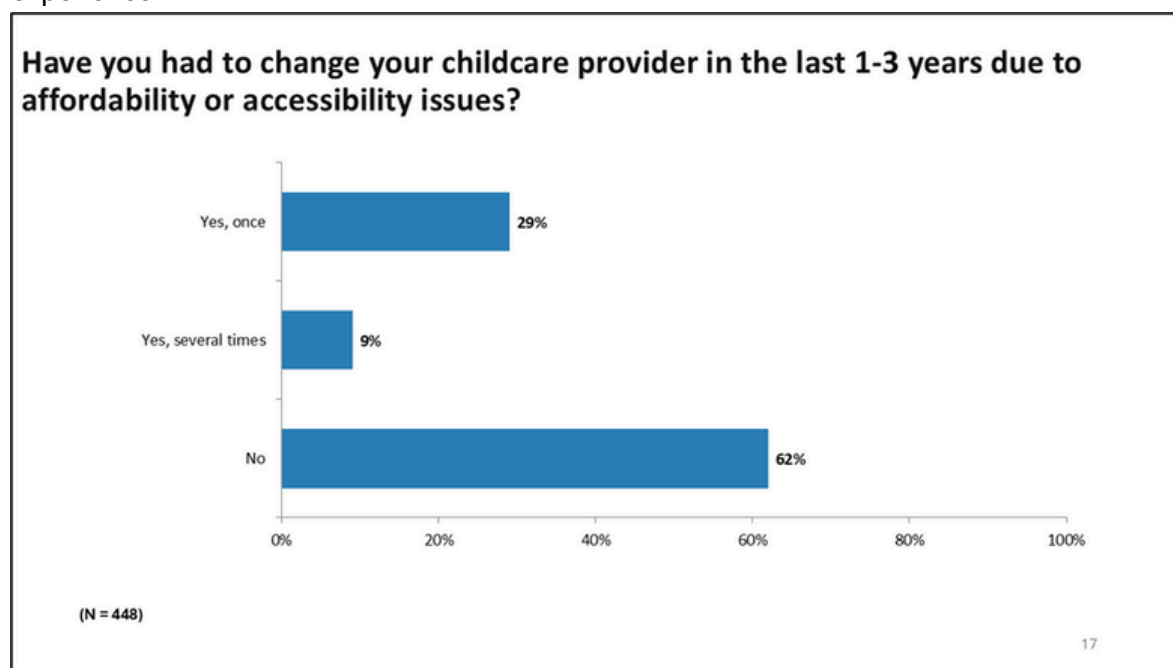
What are the biggest challenges you face in finding or using childcare?

Summary of chart: Long waitlists (44%), affordability without qualifying for aid (40%), and mismatched hours (31%) are major barriers. Structural limitations outweigh individual choices.



Have you had to change your childcare provider in the last 1–3 years due to affordability or accessibility issues?

Summary of chart: Nearly 4 in 10 families have had to change providers due to affordability or access, showing that instability in childcare arrangements is a common experience.





Do you feel your child is currently receiving high-quality early learning?

Summary of chart: Only 69% believe their child is receiving high-quality care, with 24% uncertain. This reflects both a potential misalignment between expectations and offerings and a gap in perceived quality.

Do you feel your child is currently receiving high-quality early learning?

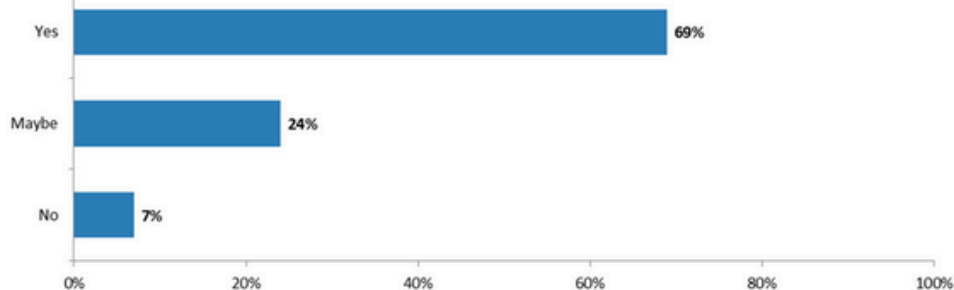
For context: By "high-quality early learning", we mean:

The childcare environment is safe, healthy, and conveniently located

Children are happy and make friends

Children are learning social skills like cooperation and self-regulation

Children are learning early reading, science and math concepts



(N = 450)

18

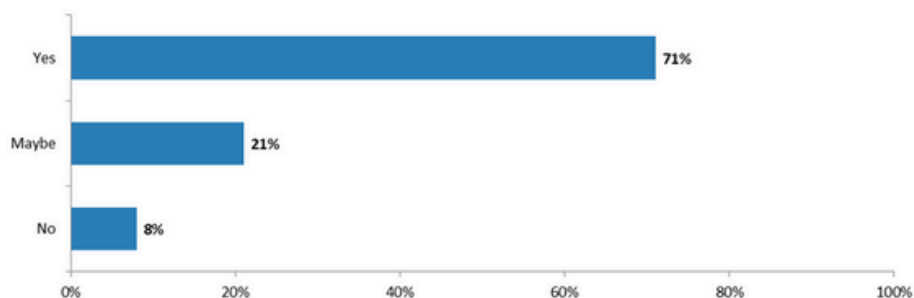
Do you feel prepared to support your child's kindergarten readiness?

Summary of chart: While most parents (71%) feel prepared to support their child's readiness, a significant minority (29%) are unsure or do not feel prepared, suggesting need for home learning resources.

Do you feel prepared to support your child's kindergarten readiness?

For context: "Kindergarten Readiness" can be understood as

"Children are ready for kindergarten when they can: communicate their needs, wants, and thoughts, engage in new activities, follow directions, regulate their behaviors, demonstrate age-appropriate academic skills, and respect others."



(N = 454)

19

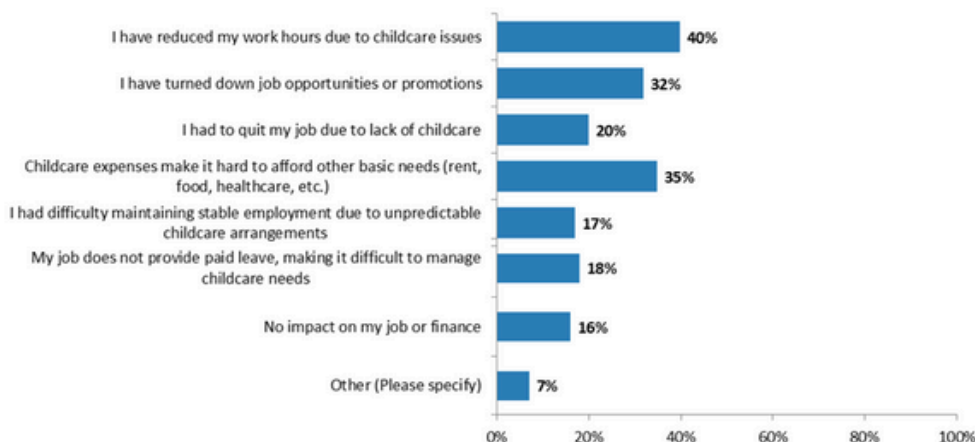


Have childcare challenges affected your work or financial situation?

Summary of chart: Childcare has had significant economic impacts - 40% reduced work hours and 32% turned down jobs. The burden disproportionately affects career and financial stability.

Have childcare challenges affected your work or financial situation?

(Check all that apply)



(N = 444)

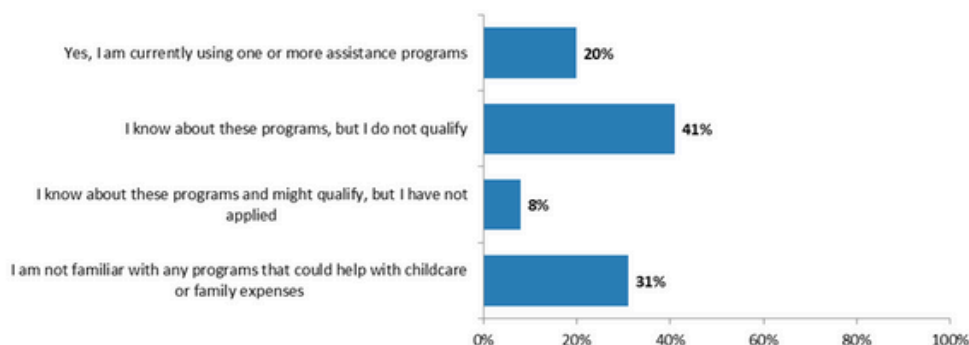
22

Are you currently using, or aware of, any financial assistance or community programs that help with childcare or family expenses?

Summary of chart: While awareness is high, only 20% are currently using programs, 41% know about them but do not qualify, and 31% are unfamiliar — indicating major outreach and eligibility gaps.

Are you currently using, or aware of, any financial assistance or community programs that help with childcare or family expenses?

(Select one that best applies to you.)



(N = 451)

23

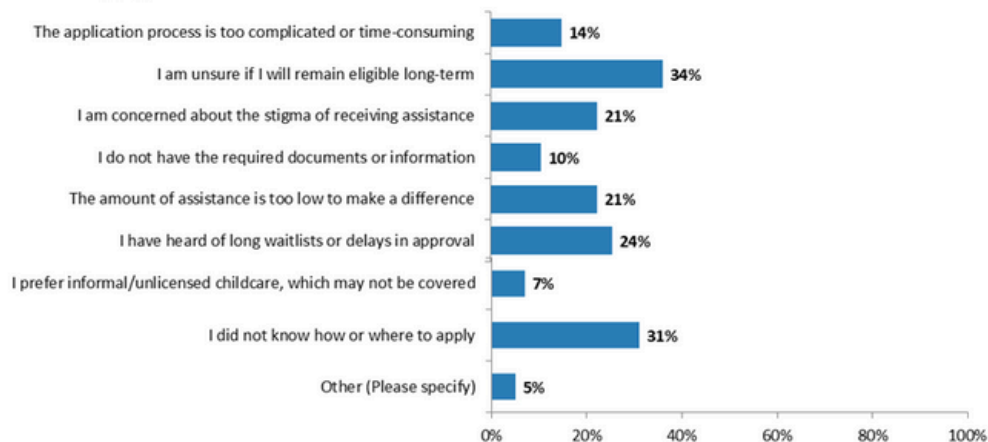


What are the main reasons you have not applied for childcare financial assistance programs?

Summary of chart: Top barriers include uncertainty about eligibility (34%), not knowing how or where to apply (31%), and concerns about stigma and delays — showing the system is confusing and inaccessible.

What are the main reasons you have not applied for childcare financial assistance programs?

(Check all that apply)



(N = 131)

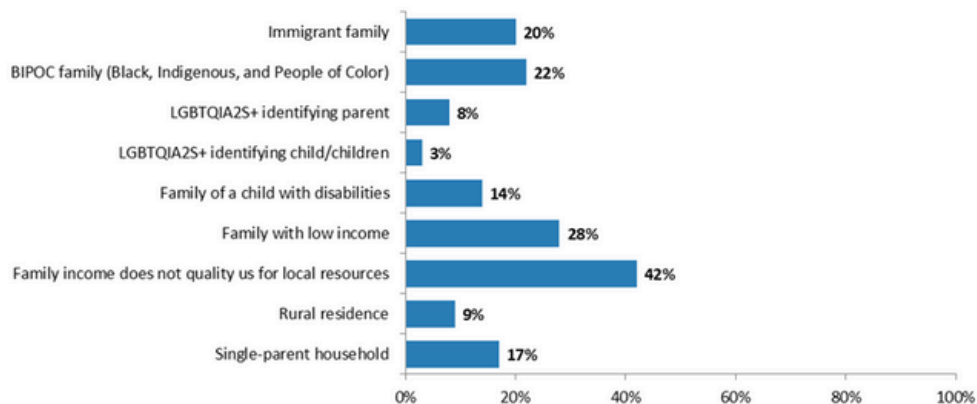
24

Does your family identify with any of the following groups?

Summary of chart: Many families belong to historically marginalized or structurally excluded groups. Notably, 42% report falling into the income gap — not low enough to qualify for support but still unable to afford care.

Does your family identify with any of the following groups?

(Check all that apply)



(N = 392)

25

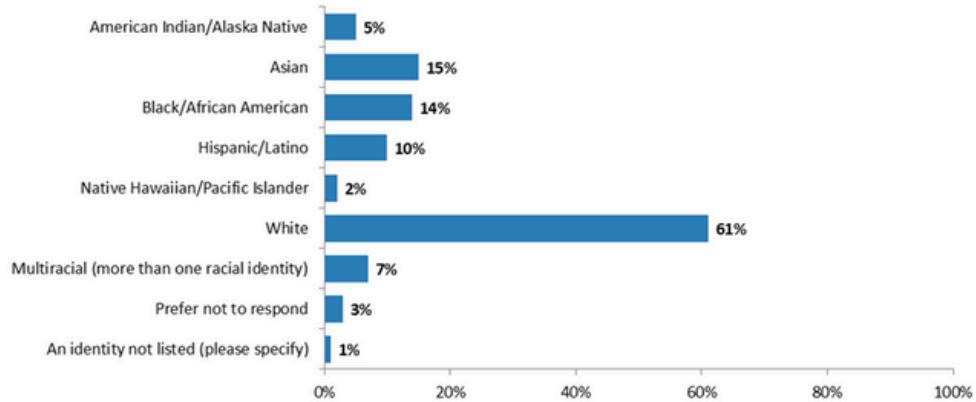


What is your racial/ethnic identity?

Summary of chart: Most respondents identify as White (61%), followed by Asian (15%) and Black/African American (14%).

What is your racial/ethnic identity?

(Check all that apply)



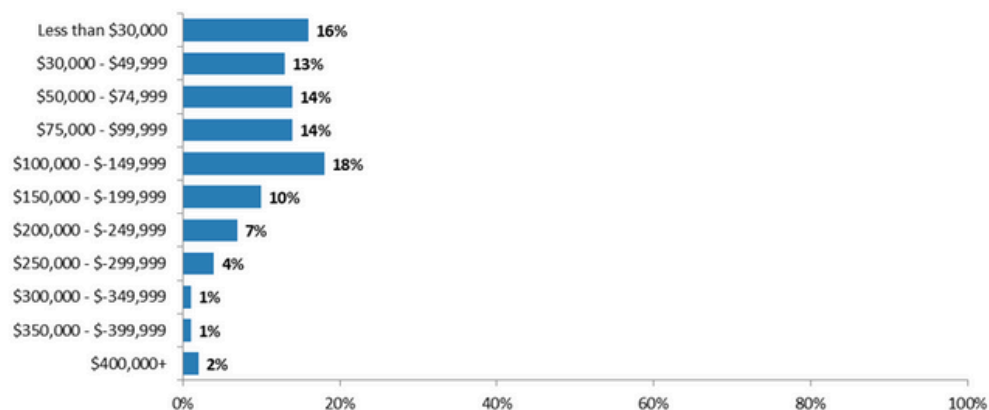
(N = 451)

26

Which category best describes your annual household income?

Summary of chart: There is a fairly even spread across lower to middle income brackets, with most households earning under \$150K. About 16% report incomes below \$30K.

Which category best describes your annual household income?



(N = 435)

28

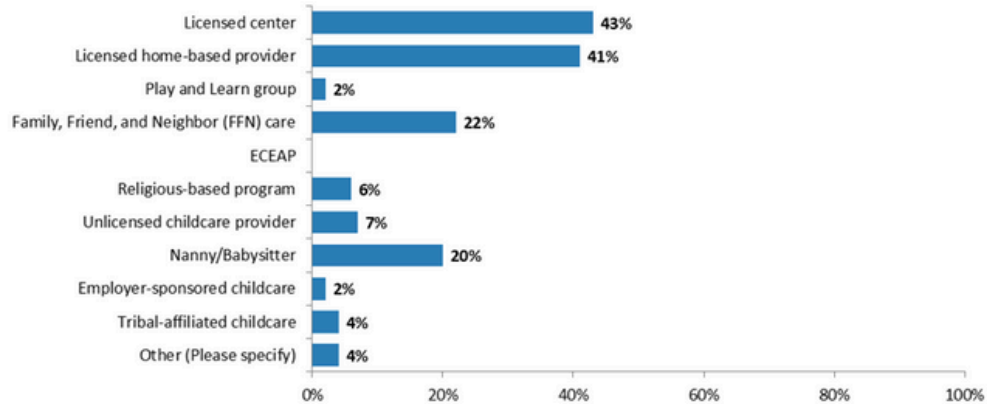


What type of childcare provider are you?

Summary of chart: Most providers identify as licensed center (43%) or home-based (41%). There is notable presence of informal or alternative care forms such as FFN (22%) and nanny/babysitter (20%).

What type of childcare provider are you?

(Check all that apply)



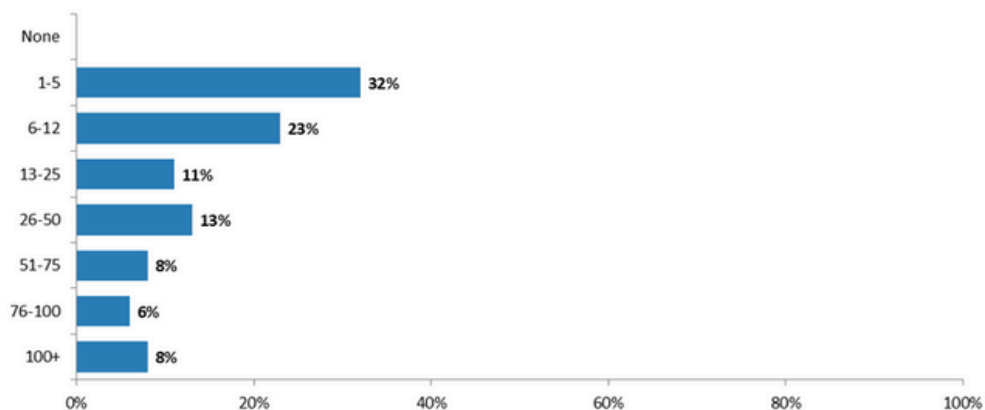
(N = 54)

29

How many children do you currently serve?

Summary of chart: One-third of providers serve fewer than 6 children. This reflects the prevalence of small-scale, possibly licensed home-based or informal settings.

How many children do you currently serve?



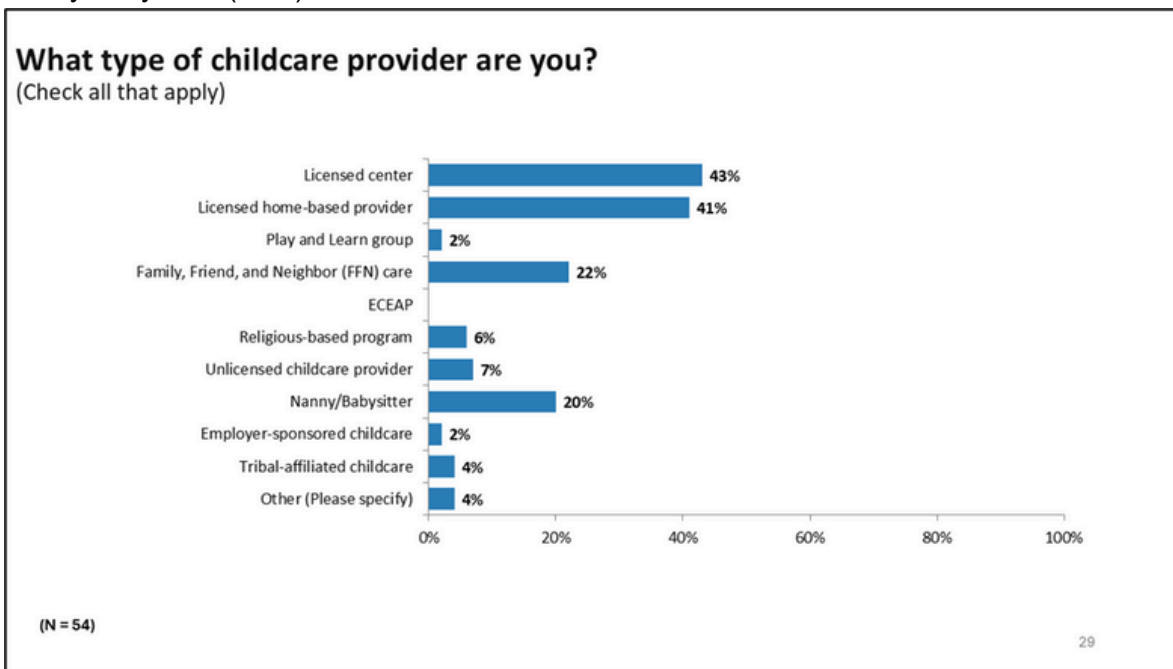
(N = 53)

30



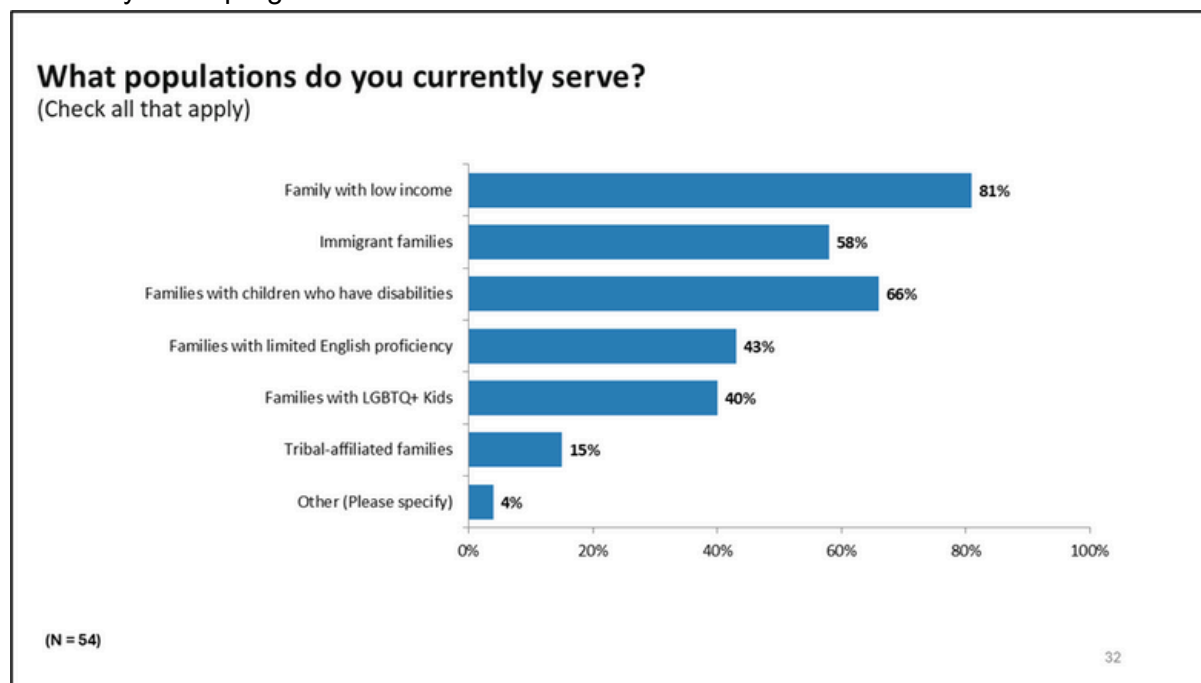
What type of childcare provider are you?

Summary of chart: Most providers identify as licensed center (43%) or home-based (41%). There is notable presence of informal or alternative care forms such as FFN (22%) and nanny/babysitter (20%).



What populations do you currently serve?

Summary of chart: Providers are serving many historically underserved groups, particularly low-income (81%) and immigrant (58%) families. However, LGBTQ+ and Tribal families are served by fewer programs.

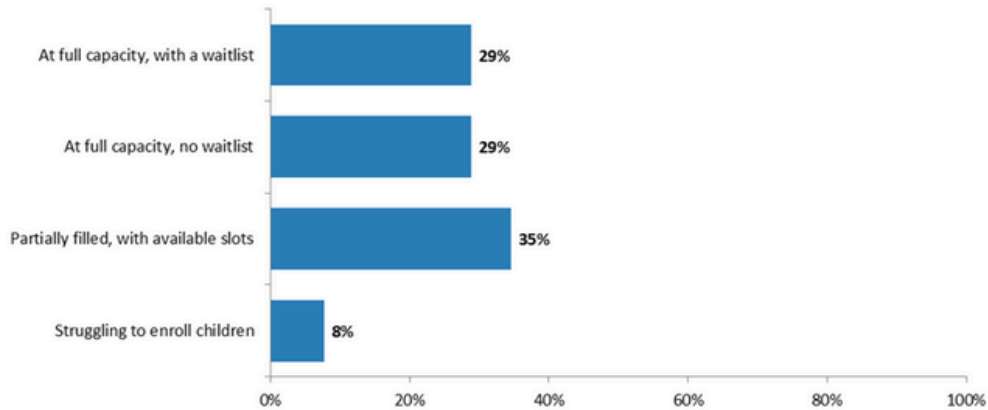




What is your current enrollment capacity?

Summary of chart: Providers are mostly at or near full capacity, with 35% having availability. This suggests both high demand and potential mismatch in communication or outreach.

What is your current enrollment capacity?



(N=52)

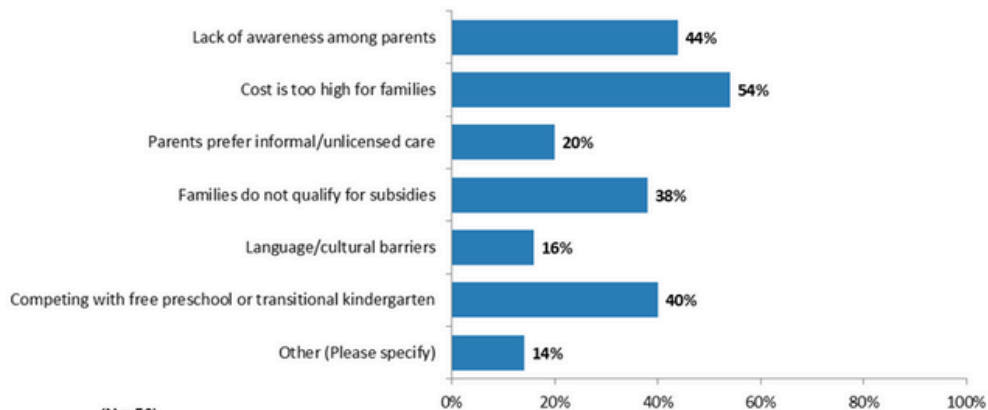
33

What are the biggest barriers to filling your open slots?

Summary of chart: The main barriers are cost (54%) and lack of awareness among families (44%). Subsidy eligibility and competition from public programs are also significant challenges.

What are the biggest barriers to filling your open slots?

(Check all that apply)



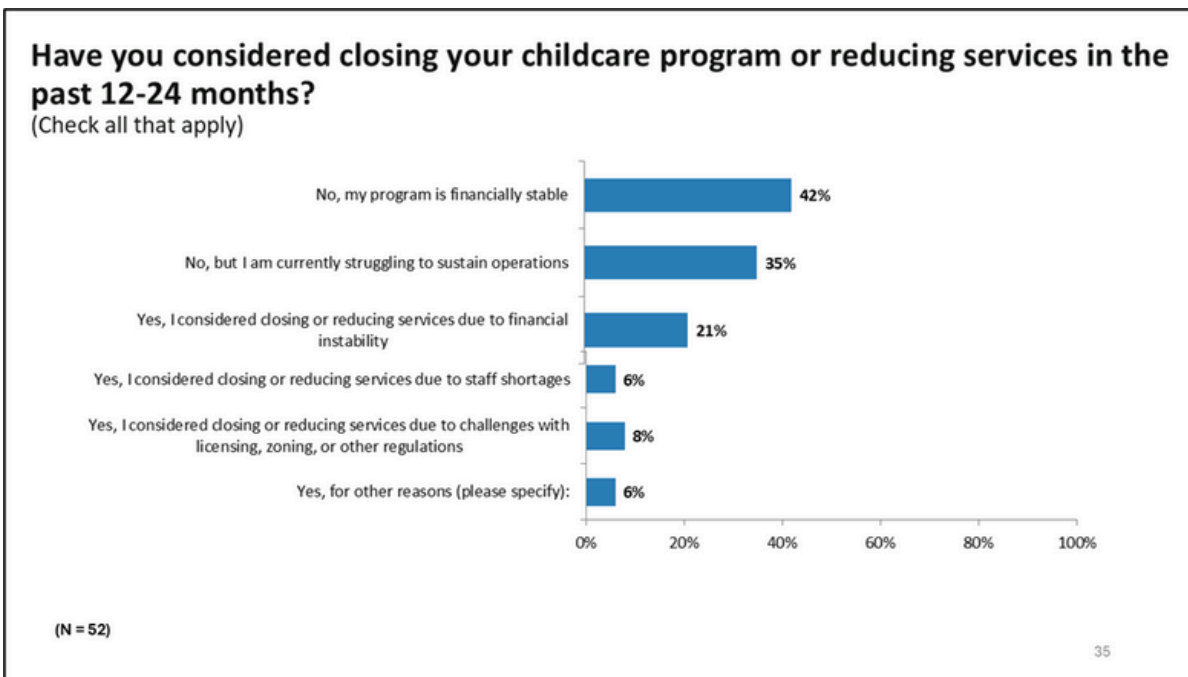
(N = 50)

34



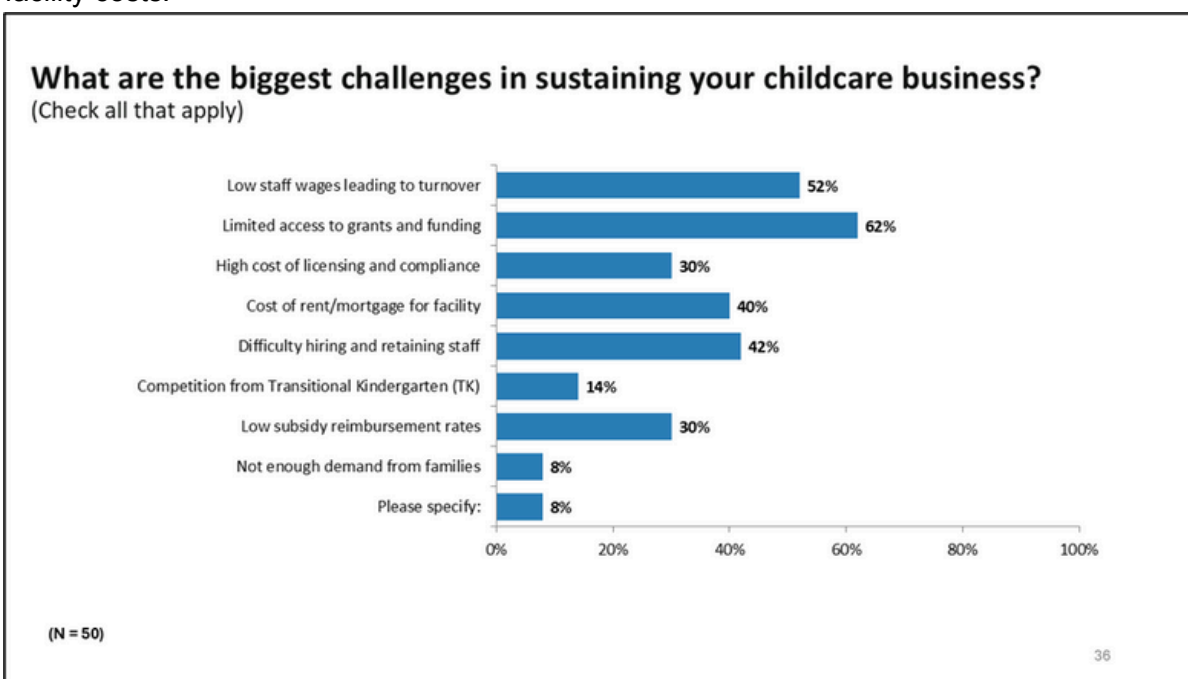
Have you considered closing your childcare program or reducing services in the past 12–24 months?

Summary of chart: Over one-third of providers are struggling to sustain operations, and 21% have considered closure due to financial instability — a sign of sector fragility.



What are the biggest challenges in sustaining your childcare business?

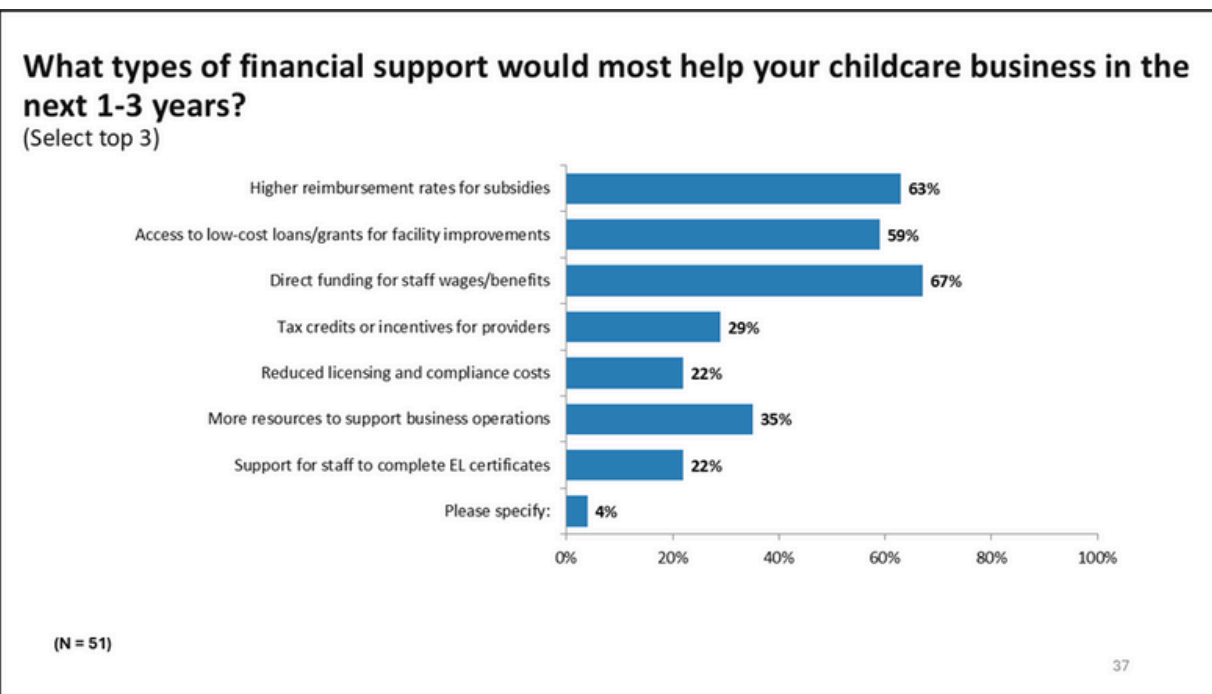
Summary of chart: Providers face numerous systemic challenges. The top issues are limited funding access (62%) and low staff wages (52%), followed by staffing difficulties and facility costs.





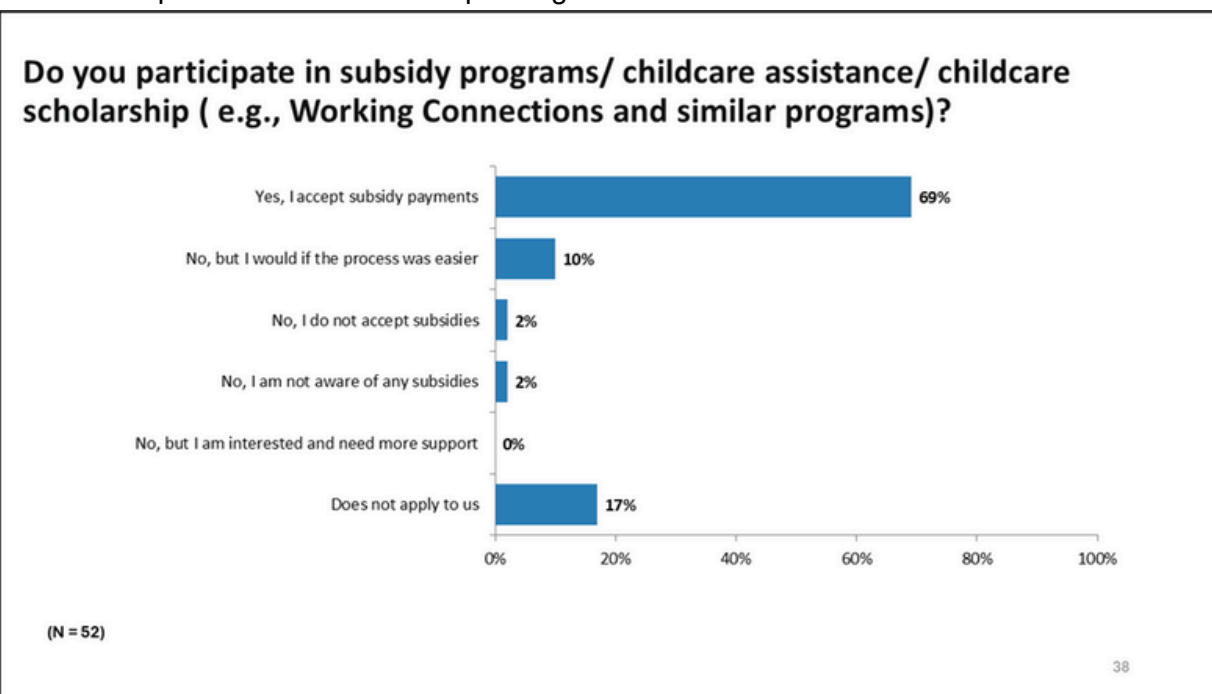
What types of financial support would most help your childcare business in the next 1–3 years?

Summary of chart: Direct staff wage support (67%), higher subsidy reimbursement (63%), and access to loans/grants (59%) top the list of financial needs — indicating both workforce and infrastructure concerns.



Do you participate in subsidy programs/childcare assistance/childcare scholarship?

Summary of chart: A majority of providers (69%) accept subsidy payments, but 10% say they would if the process was easier — pointing to administrative barriers.



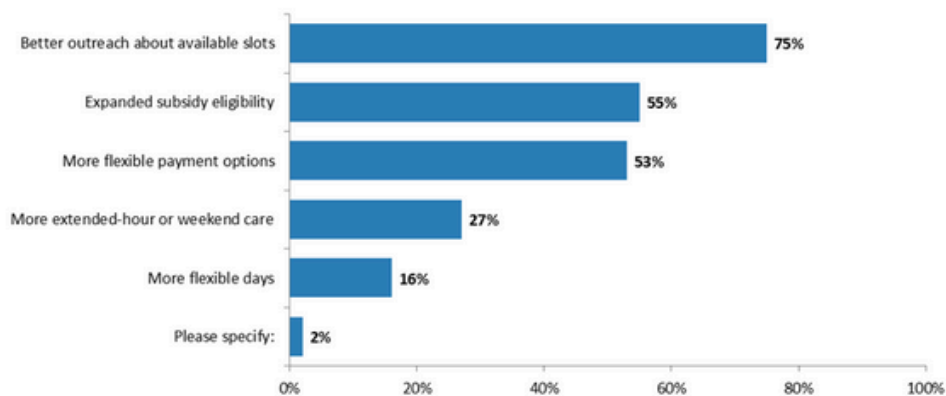


What would help families better access your childcare services?

Summary of chart: The clearest need is outreach — 75% say better communication about availability would help. Expanded subsidies and payment flexibility are also highly valued.

What would help families better access your childcare services?

(Select up to 3)



(N = 51)

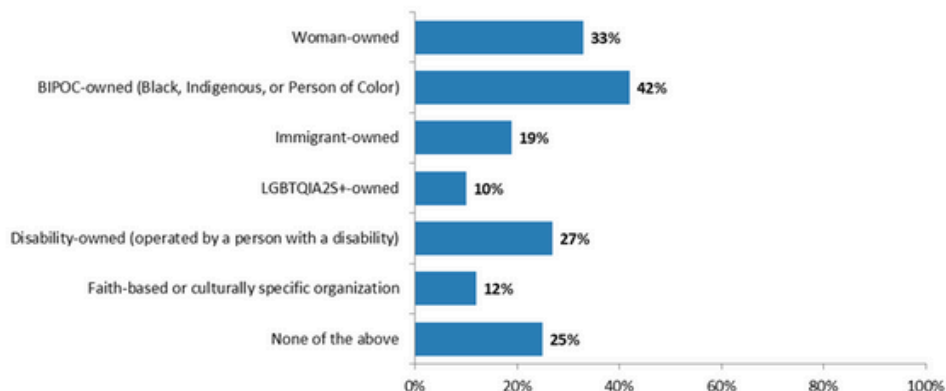
39

Does your childcare program identify as being owned, co-owned, or operated by any of the following?

Summary of chart: Many providers are BIPOC-owned (42%) or woman-owned (33%). The data suggests a diverse ownership base with potential needs for equity-informed support.

Does your childcare program identify as being owned, co-owned, or operated by any of the following?

(Check all that apply)



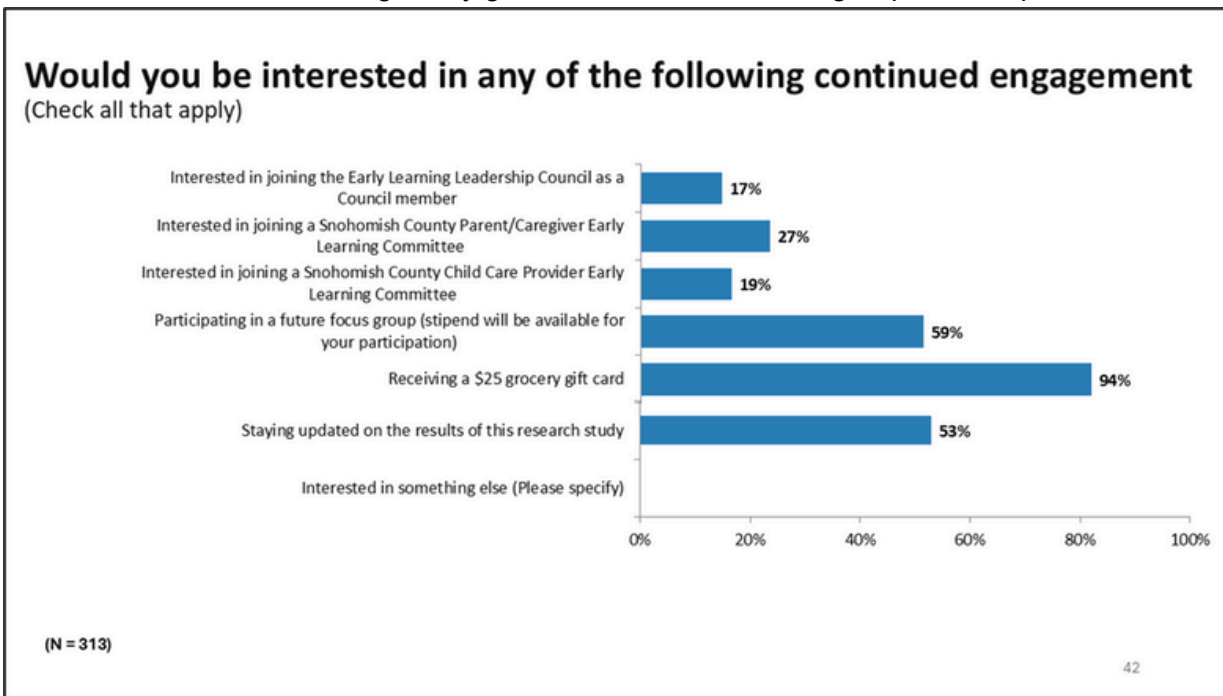
(N = 52)

40



Would you be interested in any of the following continued engagement?

Summary of chart: The biggest incentives for continued engagement are tangible benefits — 94% are interested in a grocery gift card and 59% in focus groups with stipend.



11.2 Data Collection Tools

11.2.1 Survey Questions –

Questions asked to Families and Parents

- Which of the following best describes you?
- How do you currently manage childcare?
- What factors influence your childcare choice the most?
- What are the biggest challenges you face in finding or using childcare?
- Have you had to change your childcare provider in the last 1–3 years due to affordability or accessibility issues?
- Do you feel your child is currently receiving high-quality early learning?
- Do you feel prepared to support your child's kindergarten readiness?
- What resources would help you prepare your child for kindergarten?
- If you can imagine ideal childcare for your child/children, what would that look like?
- Have childcare challenges affected your work or financial situation?
- Are you currently using, or aware of, any financial assistance or community programs that help with childcare or family expenses?



- What are the main reasons you have not applied for childcare financial assistance programs?
- Does your family identify with any of the following groups?
- What is your racial/ethnic identity?
- What is your primary/preferred language at home?
- Which category best describes your annual household income?

Questions asked to Providers

- What type of childcare provider are you?
- How many children do you currently serve?
- What age groups do you provide care for?
- What populations do you currently serve?
- What is your current enrollment capacity?
- What are the biggest barriers to filling your open slots?
- Have you considered closing your childcare program or reducing services in the past 12–24 months?
- What are the biggest challenges in sustaining your childcare business?
- What types of financial support would most help your childcare business in the next 1–3 years?
- Do you participate in subsidy programs/childcare assistance/childcare scholarship?
- What would help families better access your childcare services?
- Does your childcare program identify as being owned, co-owned, or operated by any of the following?
- Would you be interested in any of the following continued engagement?
- How would you like us to handle your contact information?



11.2.2 Focus Group Questions

For Parents:

- What has been the hardest part about finding or paying for childcare?
 - Was it cost, hours, quality, language, or anything else?
- How has childcare—or not having the right childcare—affected your job or money?
 - Work hours, stress, income, or job options?
- If you could have the perfect childcare for your family, what would it be like?
 - Cost, hours, location, language, cultural things, etc.
- “What kinds of help from the government or others would make childcare better for your family?”

For Child care providers:

- What kind of childcare do you run?
- What’s the hardest part about running your childcare program?
 - Staff pay, finding families, rules, or space
- What kind of help would make it easier to keep going or grow your program?
 - Funding, training, better rules, support for hiring, etc.
- What kind of help would make it easier for parents to access your services?
- What changes in policies or rules would help smaller programs like yours?
 - Fairness with funding, easier licensing, or more support
- What support do you imagine from business?



Section 12: Where We Go From Here



This report is not the end — it serves as both a mirror and a map. A mirror that reflects the realities of families and providers across Snohomish County and a map that guides future actions grounded in inclusion, listening, and equity.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the nearly 500 families and child care providers who shared their voices and experiences regarding the mixed delivery system in Snohomish County. The Early Learning Leadership Council is dedicated to collaborating with partners, elected officials, and the community to implement the EL Council recommendations aimed at improving Snohomish County's mixed delivery system. We hope to work alongside other counties to support both local and statewide solutions to enhance access to high-quality early learning for every child in Washington State.

The Early Learning Leadership Council is committed to sharing the findings of this report and amplifying the voices of families and child care providers in Snohomish County. If you would like a presentation for your organization, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, city council, or community group, please visit our website at snohomishcountyearlylearningcoalition.org. Lastly, this report serves as an advocacy tool for everyone who cares about children and their access to early learning. We invite everyone to join the movement that invests in, supports, and advocates for the health, well-being, and success of all young children.





www.snohomishcountyearlylearningcoalition.org