

# Family and provider listening sessions

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## *Findings from listening sessions*

Prepared for First 5 Riverside County  
by Poder Consulting Group  
May 13, 2026





# Learning and research questions

1

What would it take to improve families' access to child care and other resources to ensure all children ages 0 - 5 are happy, healthy and ready for success in kindergarten and beyond?

How do parents define and look for when thinking about quality in early learning programs?

What are families' most pressing challenges in supporting their children?





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What are families' most pressing challenges in supporting their children?

2

What would it take to transform Quality Start to best support early learning providers to sustain their own learning and quality improvement efforts?

How do providers define and intentionally build the quality of their programs?

What are the most pressing challenges providers face in meeting the needs of families?





# Our methodology

We conducted three listening sessions with families and one with providers reaching a total of 94 parents and caregivers and 9 providers.



1

## Community - centered design

- Grounded in culturally responsive, equity - driven principles
- Designed to be engaging and interactive
- Bilingual facilitation + accessible materials

3



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- Recruitment through trusted community partners (family resource centers)
- Materials in English and Spanish
- Flyers were passed around on social media and by community members' networks



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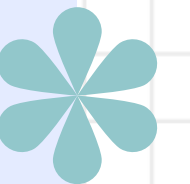
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3

## Reducing barriers + honoring families' time

- Family listening sessions were held in - person
- Scheduled in the mornings and evenings
- In- person supports included child care, dinner, refreshments, diapers and wipes, & \$50 gift cards

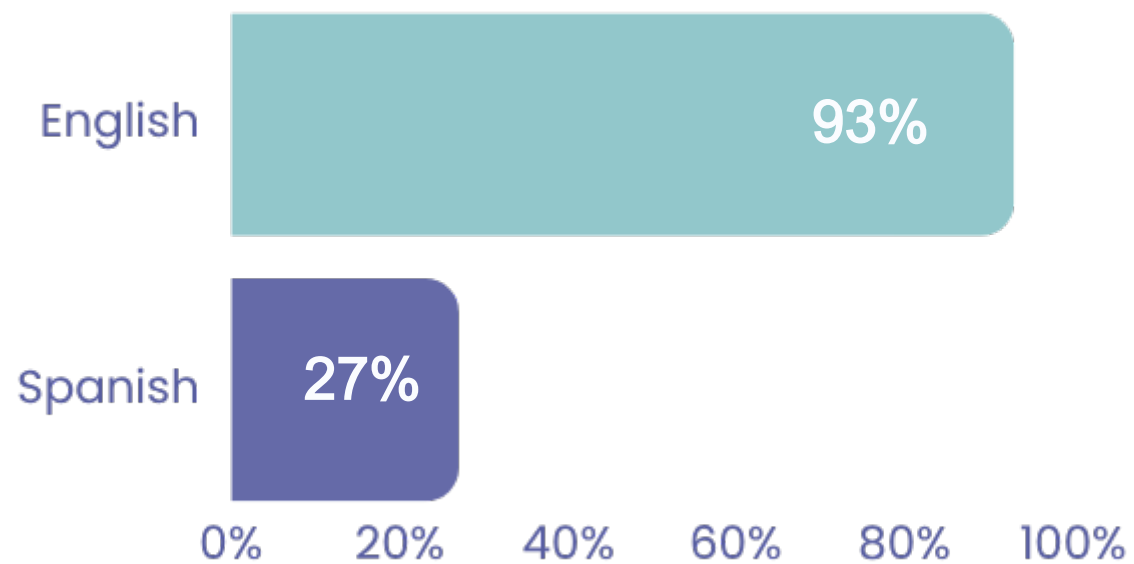


# Who we heard from

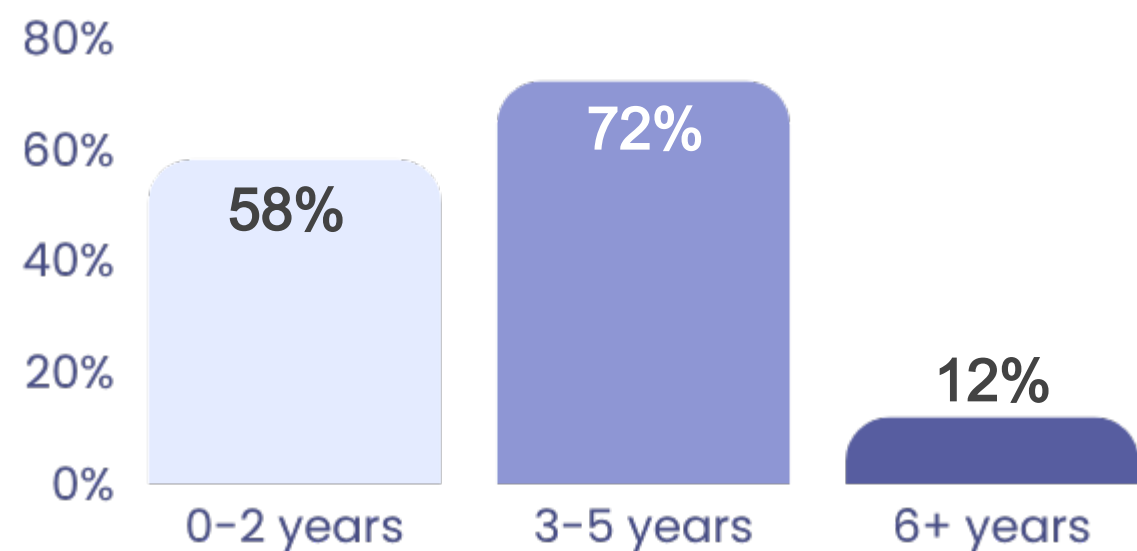
## 272 survey participants

## 94 listening session participants

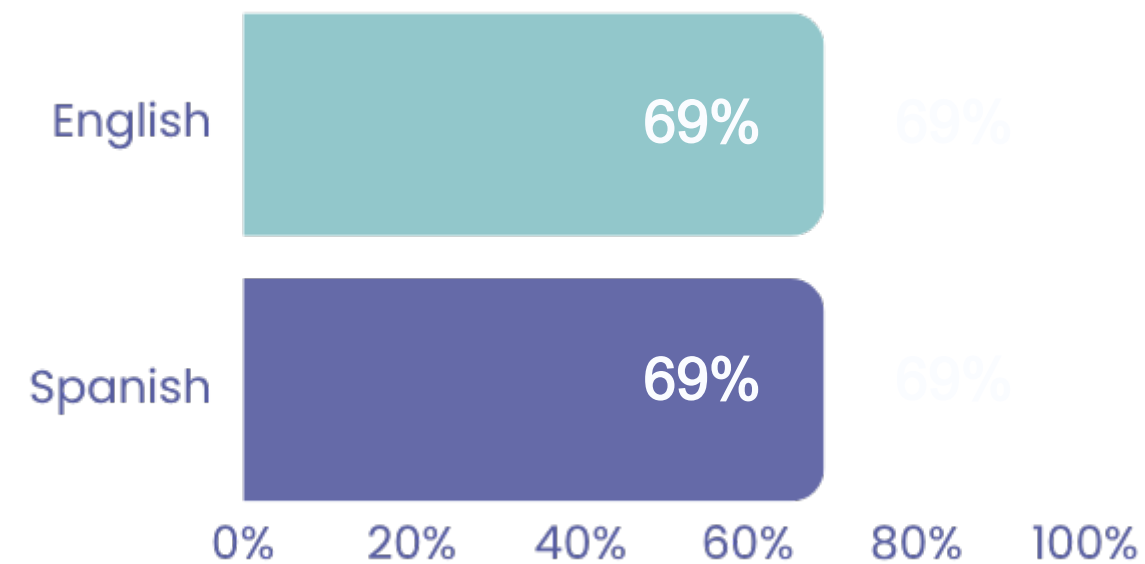
### Preferred language



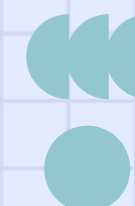
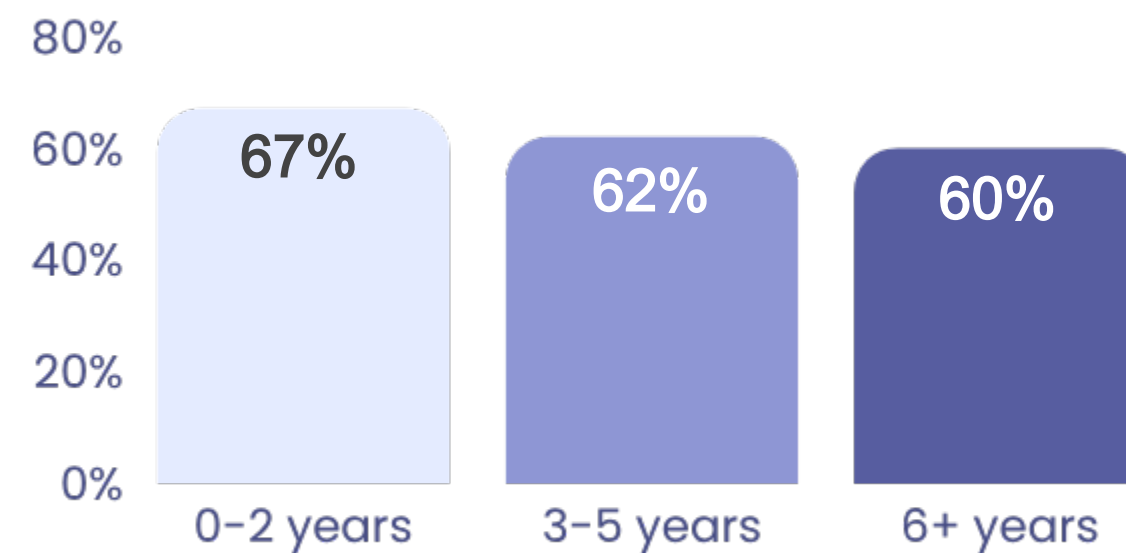
### Ages of children



### Preferred language



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# Who we heard from

## Family listening sessions



	Number of attendees	Spanish speakers	English speakers
Moreno Valley	12	8%	92%
Perris	44	68%	31%
Hemet	38	37%	63%
Total	94	45	49

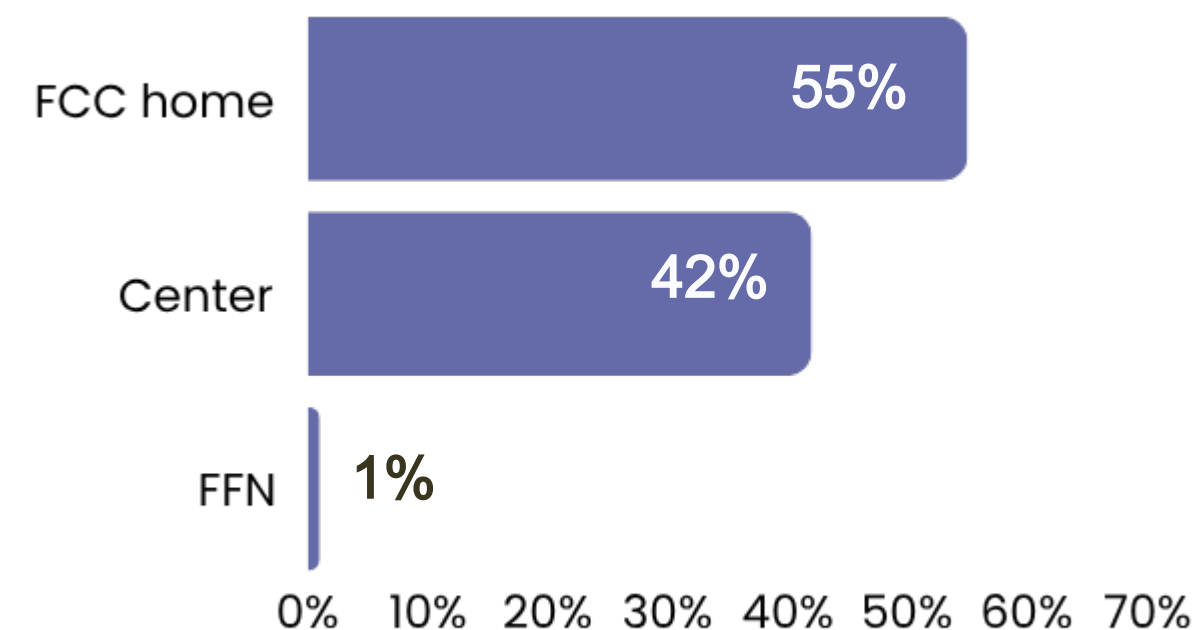
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## Early learning providers

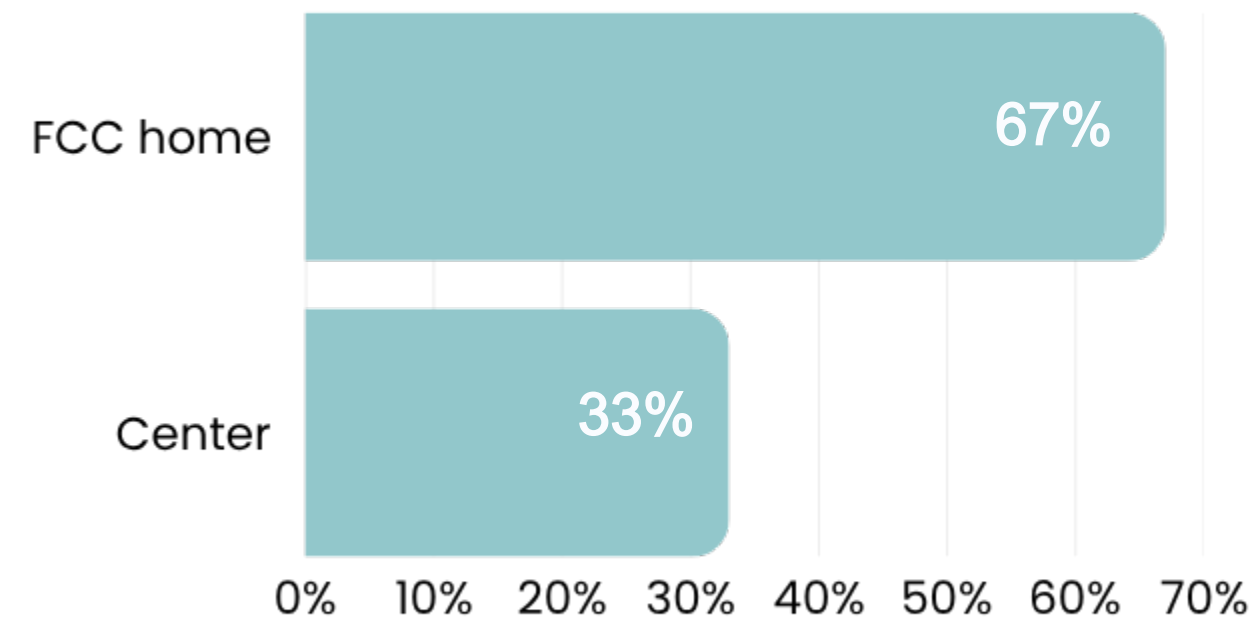


- Surveyed 158
- Listening session with 9

## Survey participants by type



## Listening session participants by type



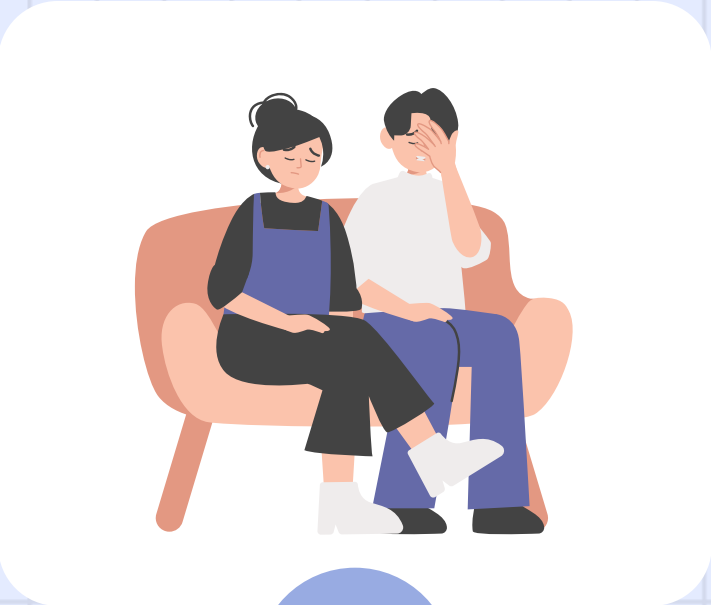


# Family findings



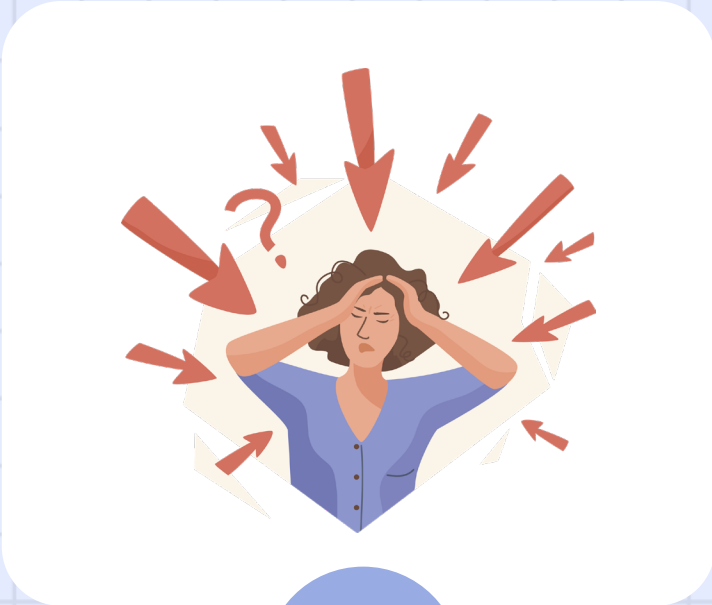
1

**Families define quality care** as safe, clean, trusted and relational, enriching, inclusive, with qualified and trained staff, and aligned with family schedules.



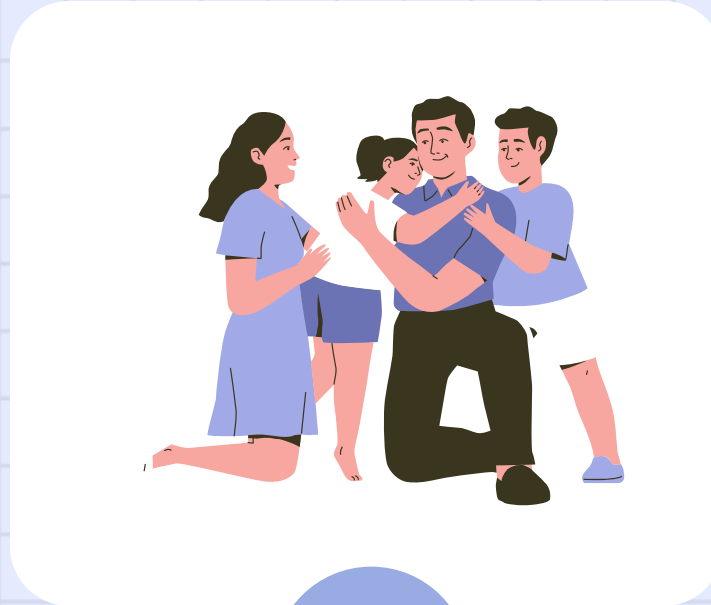
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**Where child care falls short:** families struggled to find care that is schedule - aligned, trusted, accessible by transportation, & equipped to support children with special needs.



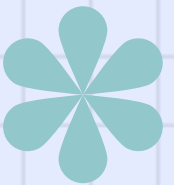
3

**Family needs extend beyond child care:** Families are feeling financially squeezed, having difficulties getting the resources they need, and experiencing mental stress and isolation.



4

**What families need to thrive:** Families want practical, local supports, from flexible eligibility and trusted navigation to connection, transportation, and spaces and activities for their children.



## How families define quality child care

Families define quality child care as safe, clean, trusted and relational, enriching, inclusive, with qualified and trained staff, and aligned with family schedules.

Safety, cleanliness, and health are non-negotiables. Parents look for secure, clean, and decluttered spaces.



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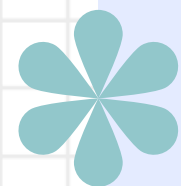
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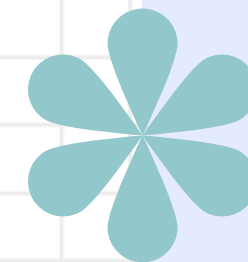
Families value open communication, transparency, and partnership with providers.





*Safety is assessed through visual cues, not just formal standards:*

I normally look to see if the kids look happy, if [they are] interacting with the staff, cleanliness, especially in the infant/toddler room. And how well the staff present their energy.



Families deepened the definition of quality during the listening sessions:

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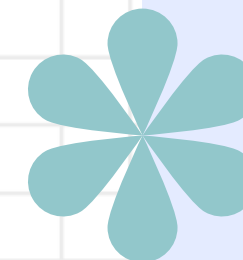
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*Trust is fragile, especially for new parents:*

Right now? Well, it's just because of the way I am. I don't know. Being a first - time mom for the very first time... maybe I'm a little scared.



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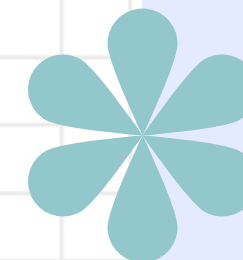
*Qualified staff means staff who can support children with special needs:*

My son is severely autistic. He requires somebody to be with him at all times. He needs one - on - one. There should be more daycares that [have] somebody that's trained with a child with special needs.



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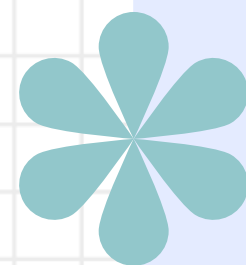
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- Trust is fragile, especially for new parents and parents not currently using care.
- Qualified staff also means staff who can support children with special needs.





## Where current child care is falling short

Families struggled to find care that is schedule aligned, trusted, accessible by transportation, & equipped to support children with special needs.

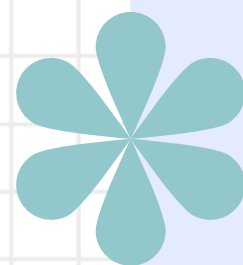




## Where current child care is falling short

Families struggled to find care that is schedule aligned, trusted, accessible by transportation, & equipped to support children with special needs.

1. Families cannot find care that adequately supports children with special needs.



I'm going through a similar situation. Education - wise he's good but it's just when he has little moments and sensory and everything, that's when he has behaviors. But it's hard because they're just like, 'Well we can't really help him because education - wise he's fine'. I don't want him to be the problematic child when he just needs extra support, because in therapy he does have that extra support, but it's harder when teachers are trying to manage 20 kids.

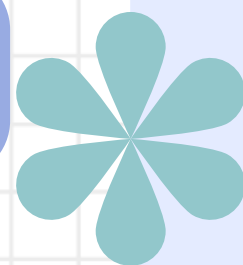




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1. Families cannot find care that adequately supports children with special needs.
2. Child care is not available when families actually need it.



It's just the times. I wish it could be full time because sometimes we have to stop what we're doing because we have to go and pick him up... for three hours.

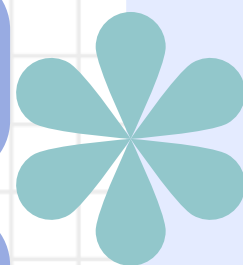




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1. Families cannot find care that adequately supports children with special needs.
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3. Trust is a major barrier, especially for new parents & parents not currently using care.



I just had a baby so now I am getting to a point where I am going back to work soon. I wish I did it now because it's like, okay, I want to spend more time, but now it's like, who am I going to leave my baby with? I don't want to leave her with someone I don't trust.

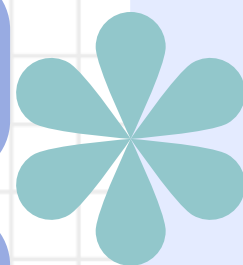




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4. Child care is too expensive, and eligibility rules do not reflect families' actual costs.



Childcare because each child they charge \$50 - \$80 a child to a hundred and if you have two or three, you don't work because you have to pay \$300 a day for childcare.

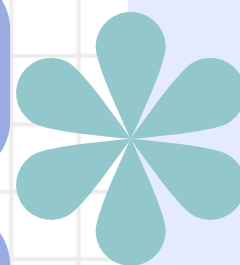




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5. Transportation, especially among one - car households, make child care difficult to access.



I was doing TK. I ended up having to put her in daycare because I don't have transportation and I don't trust someone with a car.



# Family needs extend beyond child care

Many families are facing an interconnected set of challenges limiting their ability to survive, let alone thrive. Below are the biggest challenges families are currently facing.



*We asked families to identify their top three challenges right now.*

## Family needs extend beyond child care

Many families are facing an interconnected set of challenges limiting their ability to survive, let alone thrive. Below are the biggest challenges families are currently facing.

Families are stretched thin financially by the rising cost of living and basic needs.



How is that I'm still working but I still can't make ends meet? Cost of living, everything is getting expensive. Even though we're getting raises at work, it still doesn't balance. It's hurting our pocket.



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## Family needs extend beyond child care

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Families are stretched thin financially by the rising cost of living and basic needs.

Families need better access to local healthcare, maternal care, dental care, and specialists.

“

Prenatal too. I was pregnant and I couldn't get on the waitlist. I had to go to Orange County. There were no appointments. It's ridiculous.

”

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Parents described feelings of stress, isolation, and postpartum struggles.



Just having the community be able to vent and have a safe space I think sometimes is all we really need as moms to just be like, this is hard.



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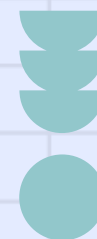


I have to drive to a park in order to take her somewhere and see something different. With the gas prices these days, it's not good. This one's the closest one, but I'm here all day. So that's why I'd rather just go to a different park. But I wish there was something closer. Instead of building all these warehouses, build a closer park.



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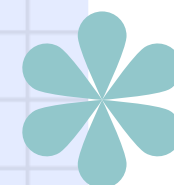
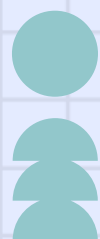
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Families need safe, accessible community spaces and affordable activities for young children.

Families need navigation, outreach, and a trusted hub for resources.



Resources and navigation. If they tell us exactly what to do, we could do it, but we just need to know where to start.



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Families need navigation, outreach, and a trusted hub for resources.

Transportation and distance make work, child care, healthcare and day - to - day activities harder to access.

“ We live here, obviously we don't live too far from the community center, but my family lives in Riverside, so anyone that I could have pick them up is over an hour away. So it's very hard to have someone. And if I don't know anyone at school, or I don't have time to communicate with the parents at school anymore, just of how hectic the hours are now, it gets overwhelming. ”

*We asked families to identify their top three challenges right now.*

## What families need to thrive

Together, the survey and listening sessions show that families need more than individual services. They need a coordinated family support infrastructure that is accessible, responsive to real - life conditions, and built on trust.

1

Economic supports that reflect the real cost of raising children.

2

A trusted hub or easier navigation through fragmented systems.

3

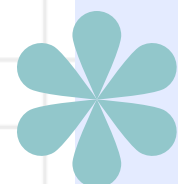
Affordable, flexible and trustworthy child care that works for real family schedules and children's needs.

4

Local, relational supports and spaces that reduce isolation and support child development.

5

Time, flexibility, and family - centered workplace supports.





1

Families need economic supports that reflect the real cost of raising children.



**What families clarified:** They want a more holistic measure of need that looks beyond income & accounts for family size, caregiving, structure, & basic expenses.

**Recommendation:** Design eligibility and financial supports around families' real cost of living pressures, not just income thresholds.





2

Families need a trusted hub or easier navigation across fragmented systems.



**What families clarified:** They need a trusted hub or navigator who can help them find, understand, and use supports across child care, developmental services, mental health, postpartum, and specialty health care, and basic needs like food and housing.

**Recommendation:** Identify or build out a trusted hub, navigator, or warm handoff model that helps families find, understand and use resources and supports.





3

Families are looking for affordable, flexible and trustworthy child care that works for their schedules and children's needs.



**What families clarified:** They want child care that is affordable, safe, clean, trustworthy, close to home, and available during extended hours. They also emphasized that providers should be trained to be inclusive of children with special and developmental needs.

**Recommendation:** Ensure families are aware of their full range of child care options and invest in training for providers to better serve children with special needs.





4

Families want local, relational supports and spaces that reduce isolation and support child development.

**What families clarified:** They need places where parents and young children can connect, learn, play, and get support, including:

- Parent groups and peer connection
- Playgroups, parent-child classes, & enrichment activities including sports
- Safe parks, shaded play spaces, & community centers

**Recommendation:** Invest in community-based spaces that combine enrichment, parent connection, and resources and supports.





**5 Families need time, flexibility, and family - centered workplace supports.**

**What families clarified:** They want more time to bond with babies, recover postpartum, balance work and caregiving, and spend quality time with their children without losing income. Transportation and distance creates additional burdens.

**Recommendation:** Advocate for workforce and local service infrastructure changes that give families time back and reduce the burden of accessing resources.



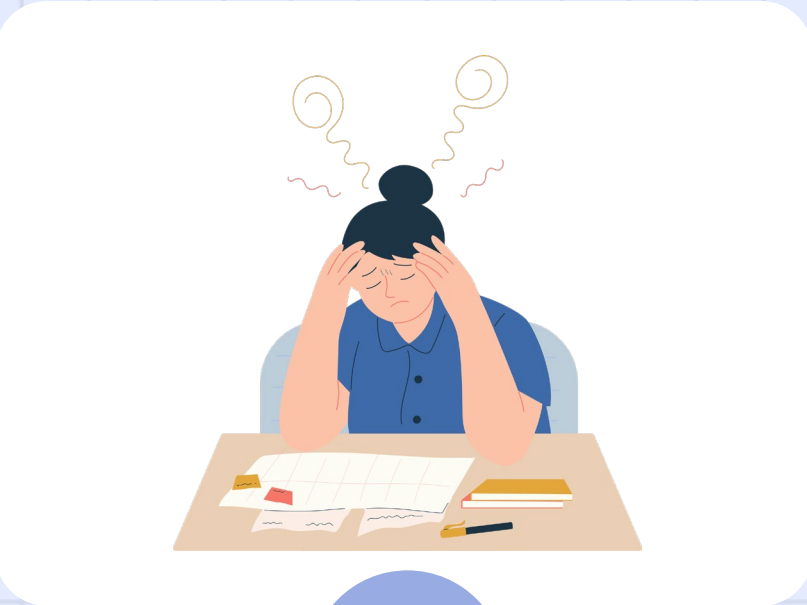


# Provider findings



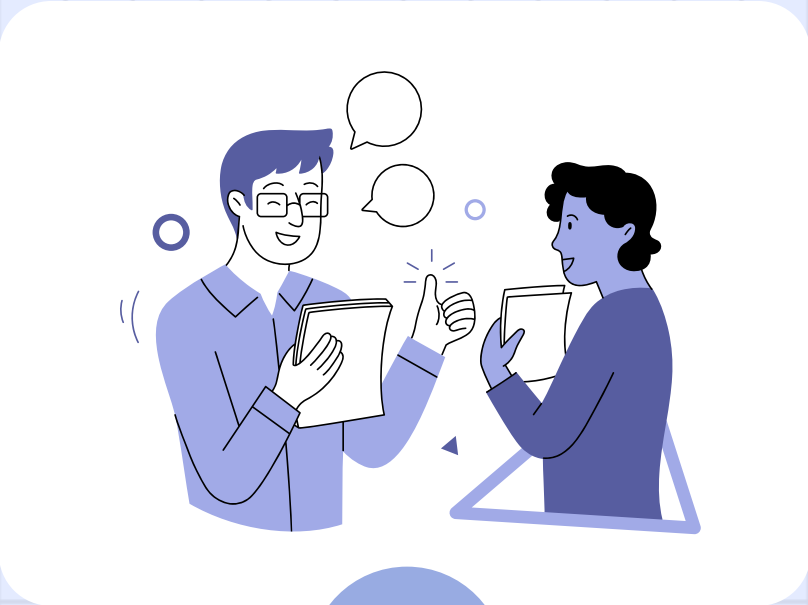
1

Providers define quality as safe, loving, individualized care that builds children's social - emotional foundation and is rooted in strong, trusting relationships with families.



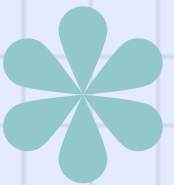
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**Providers biggest challenges:** low wages and retaining staff, enrollment instability and competition with school - based options, greater behavioral and social - emotional needs, and financial pressures.



3

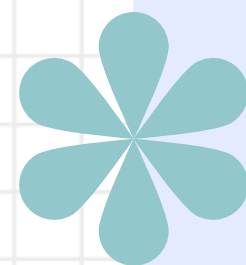
**What providers need:** help families understand full range of child care options, support with business and marketing, and more support for children with special needs.





## Challenges limiting providers' ability to sustain + grow

Providers described the following structural challenges limiting their ability to sustain and grow:

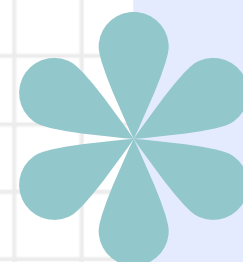




## Challenges limiting providers' ability to sustain + grow

Providers described the following structural challenges limiting their ability to sustain and grow:

1. Staffing, low wages and burnout are major barriers to sustaining quality.



Finding and retaining qualified people has been one of our biggest challenges ... the caliber of people for the amount that we are able to offer for the positions.

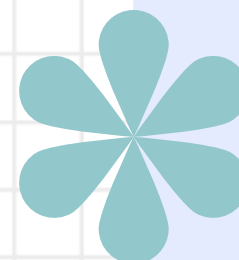




## Challenges limiting providers' ability to sustain + grow

Providers described the following structural challenges limiting their ability to sustain and grow:

1. Staffing, low wages and burnout are major barriers to sustaining quality.
2. Providers are seeing greater child behavior, trauma, and social - emotional needs.



We have a lot of children with what I would consider extensive life circumstances outside of the center, significant trauma experiences. And we're not talking about one in every five children in a room. We're talking about if there's 20 children in a room, there's eight to 10 that have significant life trauma.

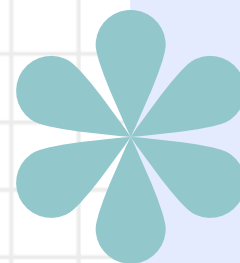




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2. Providers are seeing greater child behavior, trauma, and social - emotional needs.
3. Family child care homes are experiencing low enrollment and competition with school - based programs.



My biggest challenge is trying to get kids coming into my home. In the past I have had children leaving and then two weeks later I was already full with eight kids. Now it's been almost seven, eight months, no kids at all whatsoever.

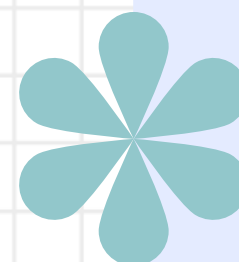




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2. Providers are seeing greater child behavior, trauma, and social - emotional needs.
3. Family child care homes are experiencing low enrollment and competition with school - based programs.
4. Providers feel multiple financial pressures including rising costs, low reimbursement rates & profit margins, and the pressure to absorb costs or pass them on to families.

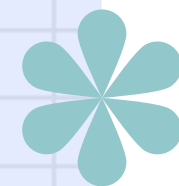


So some providers, they're like, oh no, we don't charge that. We just have the kids coming in. I cannot do that because I have a lot of other things that I have to build with the kids. The food is expensive, water, electricity, all of that adds up.

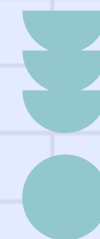


## What providers need to sustain + strengthen care

We asked providers what would be most helpful to address the challenges they are navigating and if there were any resources, services or supports they wish existed for early child care providers to help them sustain, grow, and improve their services. Below is a thematic summary of what they shared.



## What providers need to sustain + strengthen care



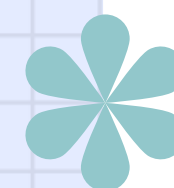
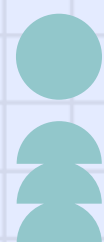
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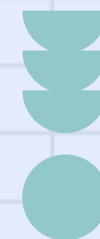
Providers want families to receive clearer, more balanced information about the full range of child care options.



Families just need to be educated and given a full realm of what their options are and what their choices are, so that they know: go see an in-home, go see a center, go consider your family.



## What providers need to sustain + strengthen care

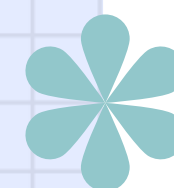
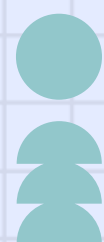


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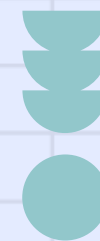
- 1 Providers want families to receive clearer, more balanced information about the full range of child care options.
- 2 Providers want Quality Start participation to mean something recognizable to families.



Give us more opportunity to let them know what qualifications we have. That's what we need —to have that quality that Quality Start is providing to us show that we are good providers , that we are qualified.

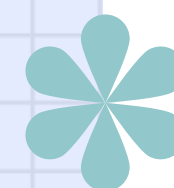
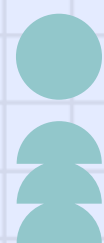


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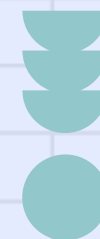
- 1 Providers want families to receive clearer, more balanced information about the full range of child care options.
- 2 Providers want Quality Start participation to mean something recognizable to families.
- 3 Providers want business, marketing, and enrollment support, especially family child care providers.



How can I continue with this when I don't have the support as a childcare provider? How about if we make a meeting and have providers come in and promote your business this way? Help us build a website, something that we can promote to teach people that we are quality . We have a quality program here at home, not just in center - based or elementary schools or Head Start.

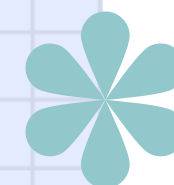
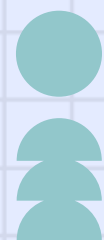


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- 1 Providers want families to receive clearer, more balanced information about the full range of child care options.
- 2 Providers want Quality Start participation to mean something recognizable to families.
- 3 Providers (especially family child care providers) want business, marketing, and enrollment support.
- 4 Providers want training to better respond to challenging behaviors, trauma, and children with special needs.



It would be great to see specific training on how to speak to parents about their child, especially children who have behavioral struggles.

