

Preschool Development Grant-Renewal

Transitions in Child Care Decision Making

INTRODUCTION

The Preschool Development Grant-Renewal (PDG-R) supports states in their efforts to analyze and streamline the early learning and care (ELC) mixed delivery system resulting in improved quality of care. Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) leads California's efforts to engage families in feedback sessions that help inform policymakers on ways to improve the ELC system.

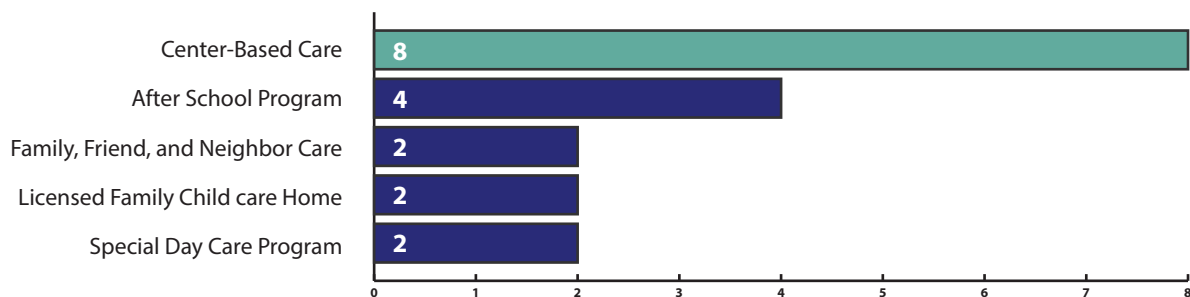
CCRC hosted two feedback sessions in January and February 2022 with 7 English- and 7 Spanish-speaking parents, respectively. Across both groups, a total of 14 caregivers participated- 12 Hispanic/Latinx and 2 Black/African American- spanning 11 counties across California. These sessions focused on families' experience with changing child care arrangements, the factors that led to their decision to find a new program, and how the system could be improved to better support them in the transition process. In both sessions, parents discussed similar reasons for finding new care and the challenges they faced throughout the process.

AS A FAMILY'S SITUATION CHANGES, SO DO THEIR CHILD CARE NEEDS

Existing literature treats the child care decision-making process as a one-time event; however, as parents discussed, it is an ongoing process that families reevaluate as, for example, their work schedules change, family composition alters, or as children age and their needs shift.

- **Changing needs of the child.** Multiple parents relied on family members and grandparents to care for their infants and toddlers due to difficulties finding a program. But as the children reached preschool age and their needs changed, families discussed transitioning to a more structured care setting that prepared their child for kindergarten.
- **Socialization and socio-emotional development.** Families also changed child care arrangements to allow their child to develop social skills alongside other children their age.
- **Access to resources and services.** Parents of children with special needs sought care that had experience in this area and could provide appropriate services and therapies.
- **More flexible care.** Variable work schedules, balancing appointments for multiple children, and having time for self-care led parents to seek out a program with more flexible hours.
- **Prior experiences.** One parent discussed placing her son in a more structured program, which caused him to have anxiety and not want to go to school. When this parent had another child, she made sure to enroll her in a program that fit her temperament and had a whole child approach.

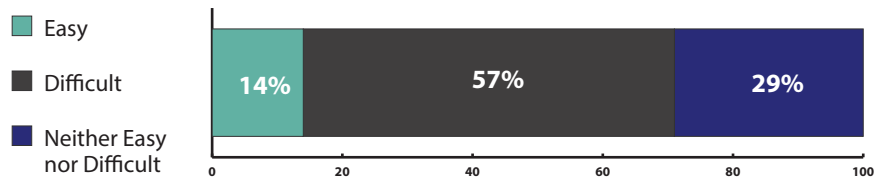
The most common child care arrangement was **Center-Based Care**



CHALLENGES IN TRANSITIONING TO NEW CARE

Parents stated that there were insufficient resources available when looking for child care, leaving them feeling isolated and unsupported. When discussing their process of finding care, families described running into barrier after barrier, encountering websites with outdated information, and struggling to navigate the complex landscape on their own. Most parents relied on word-of mouth and individual research because the system and online resources weren't helpful and were too difficult to navigate, especially for parents whose primary language was not English.

A majority of parents **found the process of finding a new child care arrangement to be difficult**



- **Lack of available resources and supports.** Parents felt that the current system places the burden on them to do their own research and navigate the disjointed system in order to find available care that meets their needs. As one parent stated, "I had a doctor point at a wall with pamphlets and tell me 'good luck'. You have to be proactive in getting information."
- **Confusing and burdensome paperwork.** Across both sessions, caregivers were overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork they had to fill out to access care and obtain a child care subsidy. Parents found the forms to be unnecessarily confusing, especially if their primary language is not English.
- **Unable to access subsidies.** Numerous parents struggled to both find and pay for child care because their income fell just above the threshold necessary to qualify for a subsidy.
- **Insufficient parental leave.** Current parental leave benefits forced caregivers to return to work before they could secure child care.
- **Appropriate care for children with special needs.** Parents faced difficulties in finding programs that were qualified or had experience caring for children with special needs or developmental delays, and this information was not readily available online.



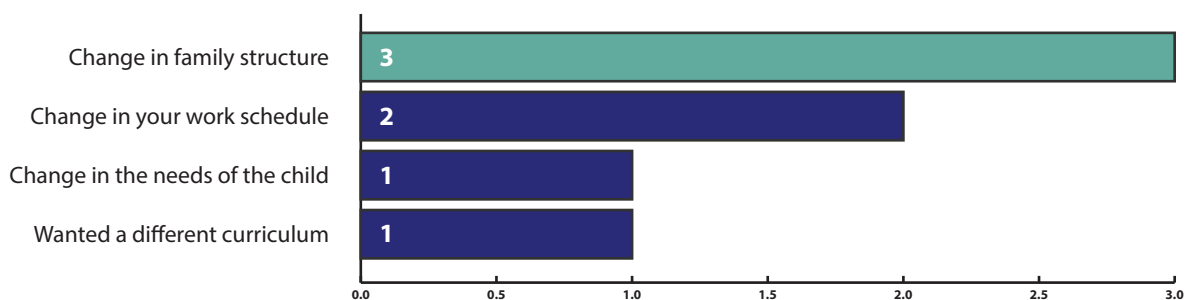
"I've seen friends of mine give up and rely on family and the child loses in development and fall behind in school and try to catch up."

– Parent, San Bernardino County

"I found jobs faster than I ever found child care."

– Parent, Alameda County

Families change child care arrangements for a variety of reasons



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FAMILIES

"I would love an online resource that has parent reviews, pictures, and a short description of the program... A Yelp for child care."

- Parent, Alameda County



- **Provide information virtually.** Multiple parents wanted a smartphone and web-based resource to view child care options in their area that allows them to filter by qualities such as license status, hours, cost, experience, and special trainings or certificates.
- **Connect with parents where they are.** Parents found it useful to have child care programs do pop-up booths at events and in community spaces to speak with families about child care options and the resources that are available to them.
 - Parents suggested having fliers with useful information and links to other resources posted in doctor's offices, WIC offices, community centers, and other areas frequented by families.
 - Another parent suggested offering workshops for new and expecting parents that provides information and resources on how to find child care in their area.
- **Offer child care assessments that address parent and child needs.** When asked what elements they would like present in a resource aimed at helping to find child care, parents emphasized the desire for an assessment that connects families to programs that meet their needs (e.g., hours, cost, flexibility, cultural responsiveness, etc.).
- **Expand the availability of subsidies and paid family leave.** Expanding the availability of child care subsidies and access to paid family leave would provide families with much-needed financial stability, reduce stress, and give parents time to bond with their newborns and find quality care.
- **Programs are attentive to what quality means to parents.** When asked about what they like about their child care program, parents highlighted:
 - Flexible hours and days
 - A holistic, developmentally-appropriate curriculum that offers time for school preparation, social-emotional development, and play
 - Pictures and updates on activities
 - Clear avenues through which parents can communicate with staff about their child's development
- **Programs provide referrals to additional services.** A major barrier that multiple parents discussed was finding a child care program that could provide quality care to children with special needs or referrals to additional services.
 - Providing information about the availability of a program to care for children with special needs or developmental delays on a program's website will help parents decide the best child care option for their child.

For questions about this study, please contact:

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