



JEFFERSON COUNTY CHILD CARE **SURVEY PROJECT**

JULY 2024



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Over the past year, Healthier Colorado partnered with Open Answer, Groundswell for Good, LLC, and the Colorado Gives Foundation to survey parents of young children (under age 6) and early childhood providers to tell the story of child care in Jefferson County. This brief shares a summary of the results from both surveys, which highlight the perspectives of those utilizing and/or providing care in JeffCo.

In February 2024, Healthier Colorado released the Jefferson County Bright Futures Child Care Survey Project Report, highlighting the survey results from 423 Jefferson County parents and their experiences with child care. The report reveals that families are struggling to pay for child care and are making significant financial and employment sacrifices to make ends meet.

Child Care Arrangements

Two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents reported that their child was in some form of non-parental child care arrangement. Of these:

- Nearly 1 in 5 families reported that they used a combination of care arrangements for their child. Thirty percent of respondents use some type of unlicensed or license-exempt care as their sole source of care, while 51 percent rely solely on licensed settings.
- Cost (51 percent), quality rating (44 percent), and proximity to home (36 percent) were the most commonly selected when asked what are the top two most important factors the family considered when choosing a care arrangement.
- One-third of families are not utilizing their ideal care arrangement. Seventy-one percent of the respondents shared that it was difficult finding child care, with parents of infants and toddlers finding it much more difficult to find care.
- Seventy-one percent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their care arrangements, while three percent were not satisfied with their care arrangements. Families with incomes below \$50,000 were less likely to be very satisfied with their care arrangements when compared to higher income families.
- Child care challenges are causing widespread employment challenges or disruptions for families with young children. Child care issues caused more than half of parents with children in care outside of the home to utilize some type of paid leave to take time off of work, while almost one-third (31 percent) had to take unpaid leave.
- The majority of respondents are typically paying more than 10 percent of their household's monthly income on child care costs, with 20 percent paying one-quarter to half of their household's monthly income on care, and 4 percent of respondents paying more than 50 percent of their monthly household income on child care.
- Families make significant financial sacrifices to afford child care such as using credit cards to pay bills, borrowing money from family or friends, or taking out a loan.

The remaining 35 percent of children were cared for by a parent(s).

- Fifty-five percent said that it was important to them that they or their partner care for their children. The second most common reason families used parental care was due to the high cost of child care.
- Seventeen percent of respondents stated that they were not using non-parental child care because they could not find a spot at all.
- Thirty-eight percent stated that a lack of child care prevented them from pursuing employment or educational opportunities within the past year.

It's estimated that families lose approximately \$78 billion annually, and small businesses lose another \$23 billion annually due to unstable and unaffordable child care. Low-income families are disproportionately impacted by the cost of child care and spend five times the amount of their income on child care than higher-income families.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 - Advocate for increased investments in early childhood programs at the federal, state, and local levels.

- Create a public awareness and education campaign;
- Form strategic partnerships across the state;
- Build a strong coalition of supporters; and
- Educate and collaborate with businesses, employers, and nontraditional stakeholders.

Recommendation #2 - Increase supports for FFN and other unlicensed providers.

- Implement the recommendations learned through the Thriving Providers Project;
- Expand access to high-quality home visiting services and programs like PASO to provide early childhood training to unlicensed providers; and
- Partner with birthing hospitals, birthing centers, ob/gyn offices, pediatricians and other child health providers, libraries, family resource centers, the Triad Early Childhood Council and other community-based organizations that can reach families.

Recommendation #3 - Improve access to the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) for under-resourced working families and parents in school/job training.

- Conduct an analysis of the JeffCo CCCAP program and inventory ways the program can be improved for families;
- Improve provider payment practices where possible to encourage providers to participate in the program;
- Implement presumptive eligibility for all families;
- Improve access to priority populations; and
- Help families determine if they are eligible for additional public benefits programs when they apply for CCCAP.

A survey was fielded in Jefferson County, Colorado in January - March 2024 with a range of licensed and unlicensed providers who worked in JeffCo, including: teachers, nannies, babysitters, at-home childcare providers, and directors at private child care facilities. Utilizing an interest form allowed the early childhood providers to schedule interviews at a specific date and time or they were able to complete the survey through tabling events at libraries. Outreach was also conducted directly to licensed facilities utilizing public data from the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) to conduct additional interviews if people were interested.

High-Level Findings

Benefits: A large share of providers were not offered important benefits through their jobs as child care providers. For example, only 54% of providers in licensed settings reported being offered health insurance and only 42% are offered retirement benefits. In general, administrators (e.g., directors, assistant directors, etc.) were most likely to report being offered benefits through their jobs. Family child care providers were the least likely to report being offered benefits.

Support for Providers : Providers generally found many existing forms of support to be helpful. When providers were asked to rate programs detailed in the survey on a scale from 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (most helpful), no program had an average ranking below 3.49. The forms of support considered most or least helpful varied by provider type.

- The existing forms of support rated most helpful to providers were family engagement, coaching and/or mentoring, and child care health/nurse consultants.
- The existing forms of support rated least helpful to providers were quality improvement (e.g., QRIS, Colorado Shines, CCCAP, etc.); local department of public health consultants; and the Colorado Early Childhood Mental Health Support Line.
- The potential new forms of support rated most helpful to providers were services to support children's challenging behavior, subsidized benefits, and an early childhood teacher salary increase pilot.
- The potential new forms of support rated least helpful to providers were regular social events with other providers; access to shared services; and a substitute teacher pool.
- Many providers were unaware of or had not used several existing forms of support. Among all providers, the programs identified with the least awareness or lack of use were the Early Childhood Mental Health Support Line (62%), early childhood mental health consultation services (53%), and Early Intervention/Preschool Special Education (47%).
- When asked about their biggest sources of support, providers frequently mentioned their colleagues, their administrators, and their family members.
- When asked about support they feel is missing in Jefferson County, providers frequently named adequate compensation, benefits, and mental health support for providers.
- Nearly one in five providers reported they always or often felt like there was no one they could turn to for support with issues related to providing child care.

Challenges: When asked about the biggest challenges and concerns they currently faced, providers frequently named compensation, staffing, and general demands associated with the job. Providers stated that if they could create any form of support for JeffCo child care providers the most commonly cited ideas included higher compensation; streamlined resources (e.g., a centralized place where providers could go to access existing resources); and peer support or mentorship. Child care providers also stated that they would like the following tasks to be taken off their plate: administrative burdens (e.g., paperwork, taxes, payroll, etc.); licensing or regulation requirements; and recruiting, hiring or staffing.

Economic security: Nearly one in four providers said it was hard or very hard for them to pay for basic needs, with teachers reporting the highest levels of difficulty. Housing, food and utilities emerged as the needs providers have the most difficulty affording.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 - Form a policy workgroup, inclusive of providers and parents, that can generate and design, when funded, a policy that could provide holistic, comprehensive support for the mixed-delivery child care system that promotes parent choice, children's needs, and providers' ability to thrive.

- Form the workgroup to generate and design a policy that could provide holistic, comprehensive support for the child care industry in JeffCo.
- Use philanthropic dollars to pilot the policy.
- Evaluate the pilot program and use the results to improve the quality of the policy.
- Utilize the pilot and evaluation results to advocate for additional funding.

Recommendation #2 - Reimagine child care as a public good in the JeffCo community to help advocate for increased investments at the federal, state, and local levels.

- Advocate at the federal level.
- Create a public awareness and education campaign.
- Build a strong coalition of grassstops and grassroots supporters.
- Form strategic partnerships across the state.
- Educate and collaborate with businesses, employers, and nontraditional stakeholders.

Recommendation #3 - Ensure there is equitable distribution of resources across different provider types and geographic areas.

- Implement the recommendations learned through the Thriving Providers Project.
- Ensure that the JeffCo Local Coordinating Organizations (LCOs), Early Childhood Council, and other community-based organizations serving providers are adequately funded and resourced to deliver services to providers throughout the county.
- Set conditions for all providers to thrive

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