
COVID-19 Parent Survey:

How the pandemic has impacted California parents' child care plans and preferences

SEPTEMBER 2020



California Child Care Resource & Referral



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Executive Summary

The 2020, COVID-19 pandemic has invariably disrupted the lives of many families in California. This survey sought to understand how this disruption has impacted parents' child care arrangements, plans, and preferences.

An online survey in English and Spanish was distributed to more than 12,000 parents, representing 55 of California's 58 counties. Responses showed that most families were currently using a child care center, family, friend, or neighbor (FFN), or family child care home (FCC), in that order.

For the most part, families planned to use the type of care they were currently in, and preferred that type of care as well. For those who currently did not have care, they preferred: FFN, center, community afterschool program, then FCC. The top three factors that were most important to people in choosing child care now were cleanliness/sanitation, group size, and cost (this was the same despite disaggregation by income or preferred setting). When parents were asked about their comfort level with care, about one-third each reported being "most comfortable" with a center, FCC care, or neither.

There were differences in work arrangements and child care preferences found when comparing families with children 0-5 versus school-aged children, Spanish versus English survey completion, higher to lower income groups, and geographic region. Respondents with at least one school-aged child showed a higher preference for FFN care; those who completed the survey in Spanish were almost three times as likely to have lost their job or been furloughed, preferred FCC and FFN care over centers, and were more likely to not feel

comfortable with either licensed setting; those with household incomes less than \$100,000 were much more likely to work outside the home, and showed a greater preference for FFN compared to the higher income group; the North had a slightly higher preference for FCCs, the Bay Area and Central Valley showed greater FFN use and preference, particularly the Central Valley, and the Bay Area showed more people watching their children while they worked at home.

Parents who preferred child care centers described feeling more comfortable because parents perceived that centers follow regulations and guidelines, are more clean/sanitized, have more space and seem more professional than other types of care. have control and limit who enters the premises, have a curriculum, and can help with homework

Those who preferred FCCs liked the smaller group sizes, trusted their cleanliness and sanitation practices, knew and trusted the provider, perceived better communication with the providers and other parents, and allowed parents to enter the facility.

Those who preferred an FFN caregiver were uncomfortable sending their child to any group setting right now and considered a family member the safest childcare option. Some parents expressed concern about the vulnerability of their FFN provider getting COVID-19, or their ability to help their child with distance learning due to limited English proficiency or technology capacity.

Recommendations based on these results:

1. Maintain a robust mixed delivery system. This includes the following supports for centers:

- Public or private in-kind and financial assistance.
- Partnership from schools in providing school-aged care.
- Temporarily adjusting classroom capacity based on space configuration or mixed age groups with a maximum number of families, instead of the more familiar adult-to-child ratio.

This also includes the following supports for family child care homes and informal caregivers:

- Create a program for FCCs that provides coaching and a list of procedures and precautions to be taken during this time that would allow the providers to receive an unofficial badge or certification that would convey to parents that they're doing everything they can to mitigate the risk of infection.
- Advocate for the state to apply for a federal Waiver for Extraordinary Circumstances, to gain relief from specific CCDF requirements for health and safety training for home-based providers.
- Make an allowance for subsidy payments for license-exempt caregiving to be allowed in the parents' home (and not be bound by the minimum wage rule) to help keep people together in one pod.
- Support that enables a home-based provider to assist children with distance learning such as high speed connectivity, a special technical help line to troubleshoot computer issues for school-aged children, and virtual and/or recorded play groups.

2. Create support for parents:

- Advocate for federal and state funds to support subsidized child care for families.
- Develop local and state incentives for employers to offer or subsidize child care for their employees.
- Encourage workplace flexibility to enable parents to successfully juggle between their caregiving duties and work responsibilities.

- Advocate for the state's subsidized child care system to examine and consider if their standard eligibility rules need to be adjusted in the current and immediate post-pandemic period as our economy rebuilds.
- Deploy any staff who are in contact with families to check in with parents and see how they're coping, and offer any resources or support available.
- Ensure support for non-English-speaking parents or family members who are supporting their child's online participation in school.

3. Mitigate the widening inequality caused by the pandemic:

- Target child care funds to low-income communities to shore up the child care supply and make it a safe opportunity for families.
- Consider supplemental funds since market rate subsidy reimbursements penalize those in low-income counties/communities because their maximum reimbursement is dependent on the market price.
- Prioritize low-income families in accessing child care subsidies that support them in their parenting responsibilities.
- Support parents to create a learning pod for their children using voucher subsidies. Continue to allow parents to hire a TrustLine caregiver while following the Emergency Capacity Waiver under Department of Social Services and explore available public funding targeted to Local Education Agencies, such as Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) supplemental or federal Title I, to partner with FCCs to support and enhance learning of school-aged children.
- Support a range of resources and opportunities to support children and families, in addition to child care funds directed to communities most impacted by Covid-19 as soon as possible.

For questions, please contact
Gemma DiMatteo, MPH,
Research Director
gdimatteo@rrnetwork.org

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically and unexpectedly shifted the lives of people all over the world. The topic of child care and its important role in allowing parents to work, although not a novel issue, has come to the forefront of many national and state conversations. With many child care facilities forced to close or restrict their capacities, parents feeling afraid and uncomfortable sending their children to group settings, and closure of in-person public schools, many families are left reeling.

This study seeks to understand how the pandemic has impacted California families' child care arrangements, choices, and preferences. In understanding the demand, we can better understand how we can support the supply side of the equation so that we're meeting the unique needs of parents during this time, and advocate for policies and systems that support all families in California.

This pandemic has provided an opportunity to reevaluate and rebuild California's child care system, and the only way that can be done with families as the focus is to hear what they need and want.

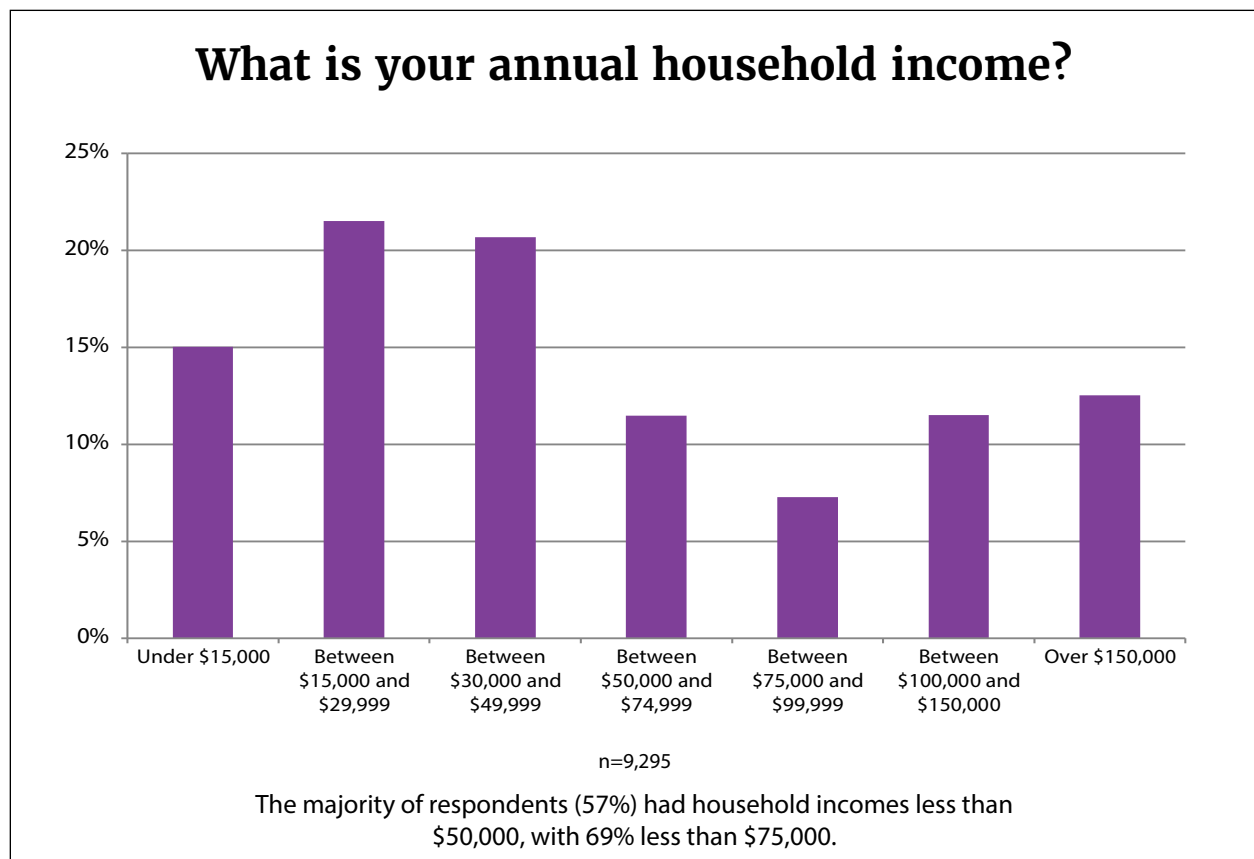
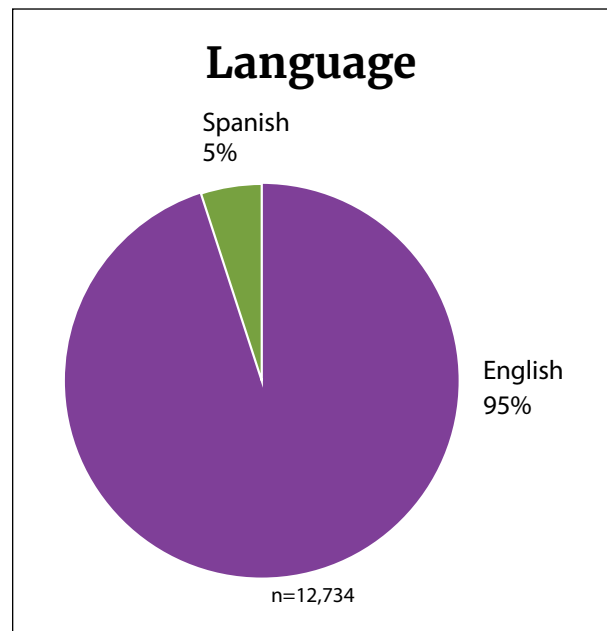
Methodology

A survey was distributed online, through California's local child care resource and referral agencies, as well as other online platforms, such as social media and local parent network newsletters. The survey was open between June 22nd and July 31st and was available in English and Spanish.

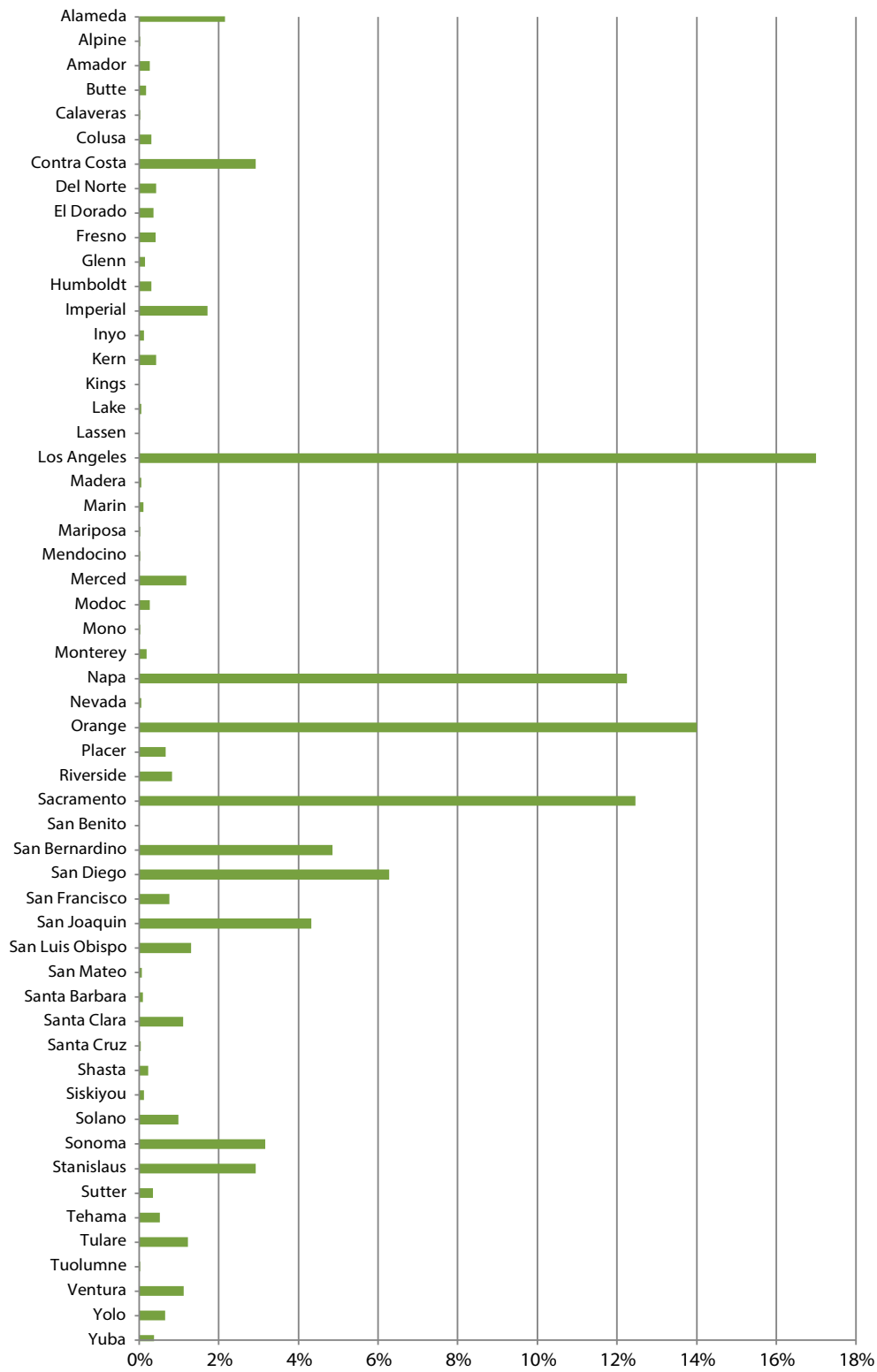
Participants

12,734 participants started the survey; 412 were disqualified for not having children 0-12, and 12 were disqualified for not being in California. 9,295 participants completed the entire survey.

12,138 participants took the survey in English, and 596 took the survey in Spanish.



What county do you live in?

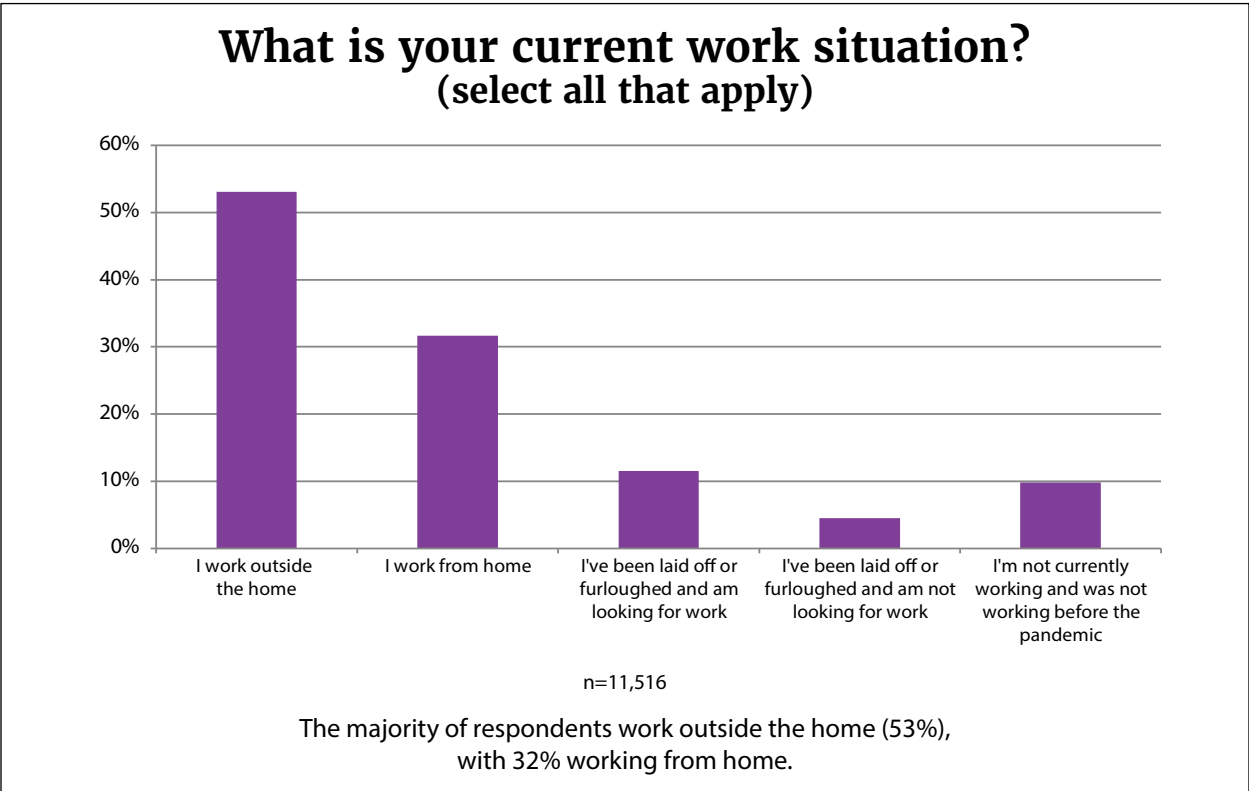
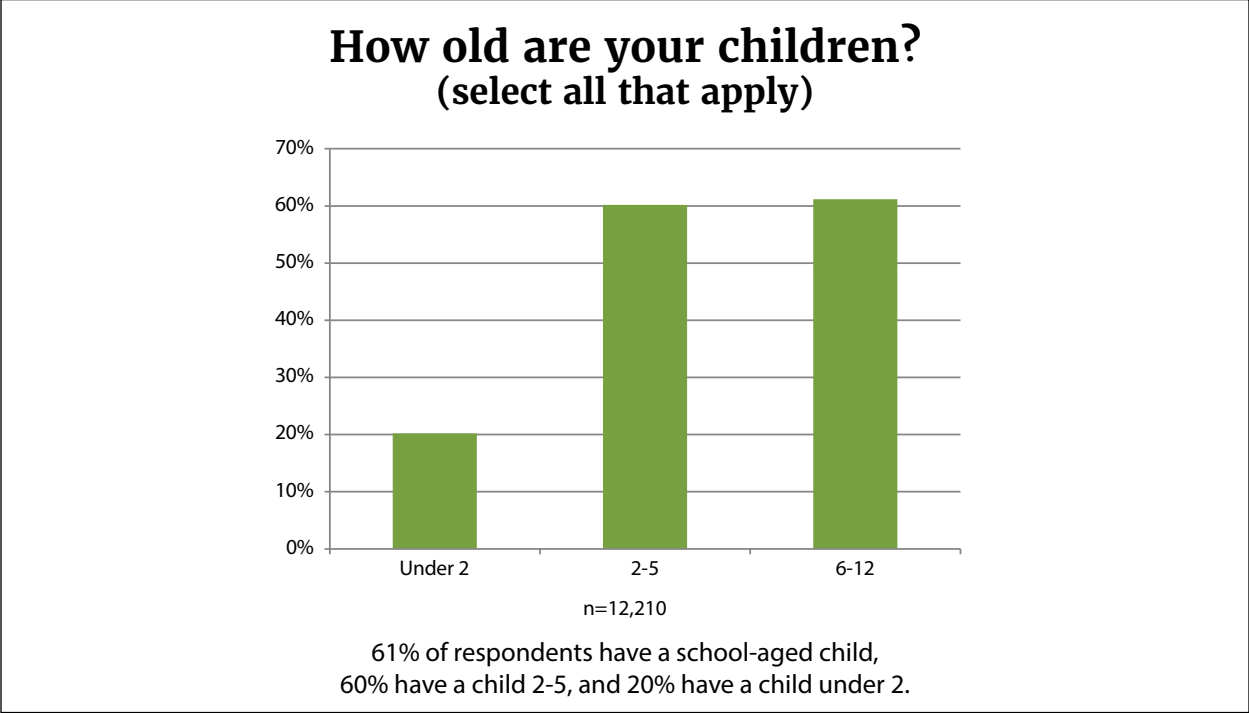


n=9,377

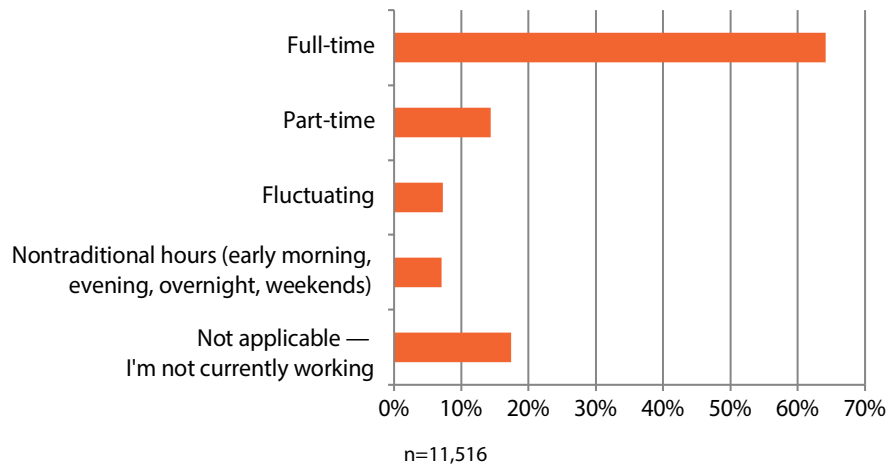
At least one person on each county completed the survey except for Plumas, Sierra, and Trinity.

Results

Aggregate Results

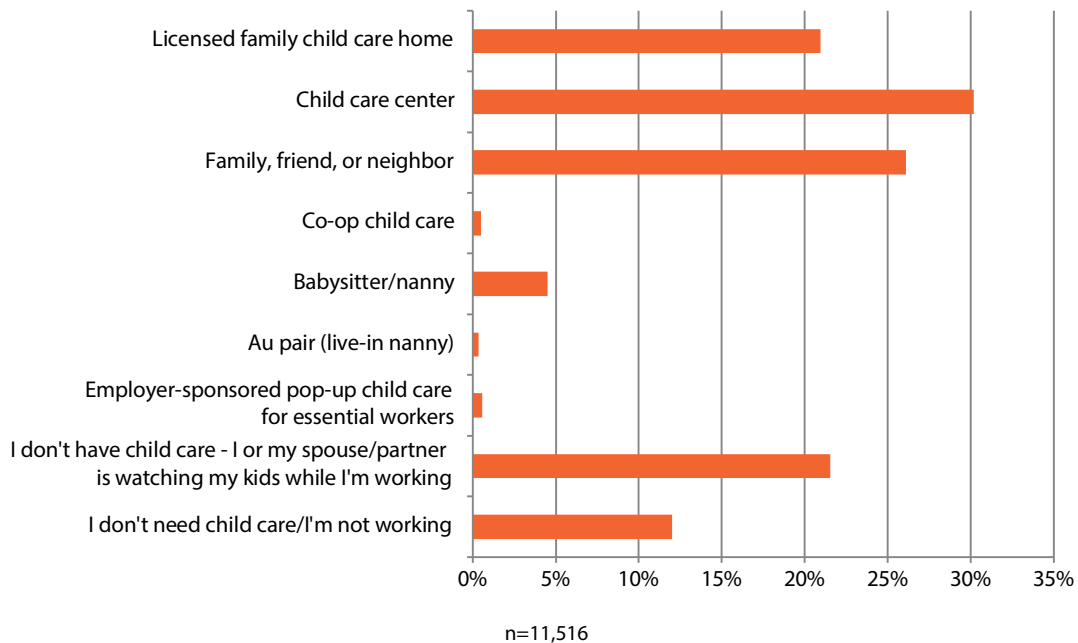


Please select your work schedule (select all that apply)



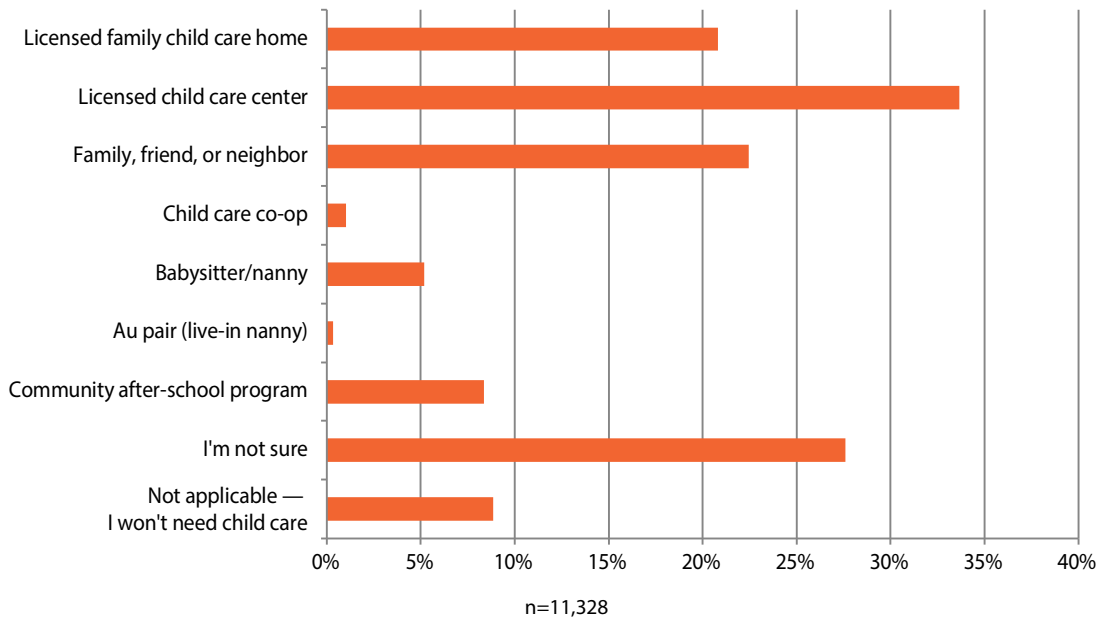
The majority of respondents work full-time (64%).

What's your current child care arrangement? (select all that apply)



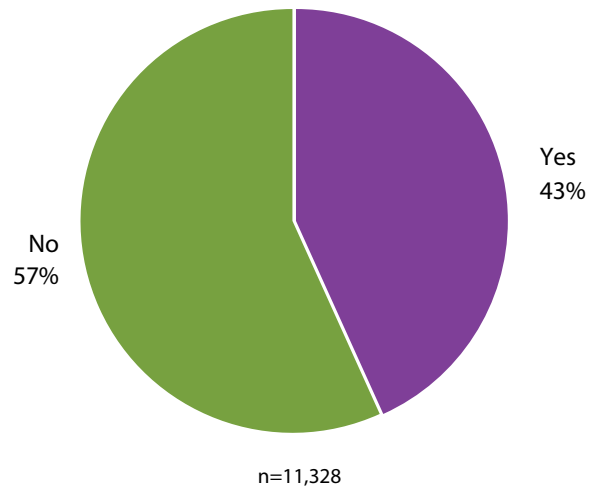
30% of respondents were currently using a child care center, 26% were using a family, friend or neighbor, and 21% were using a family child care home as their child care arrangement. 22% didn't have any child care and were watching their children at home while they work.

What child care are you planning to use this August or fall? (select all that apply)

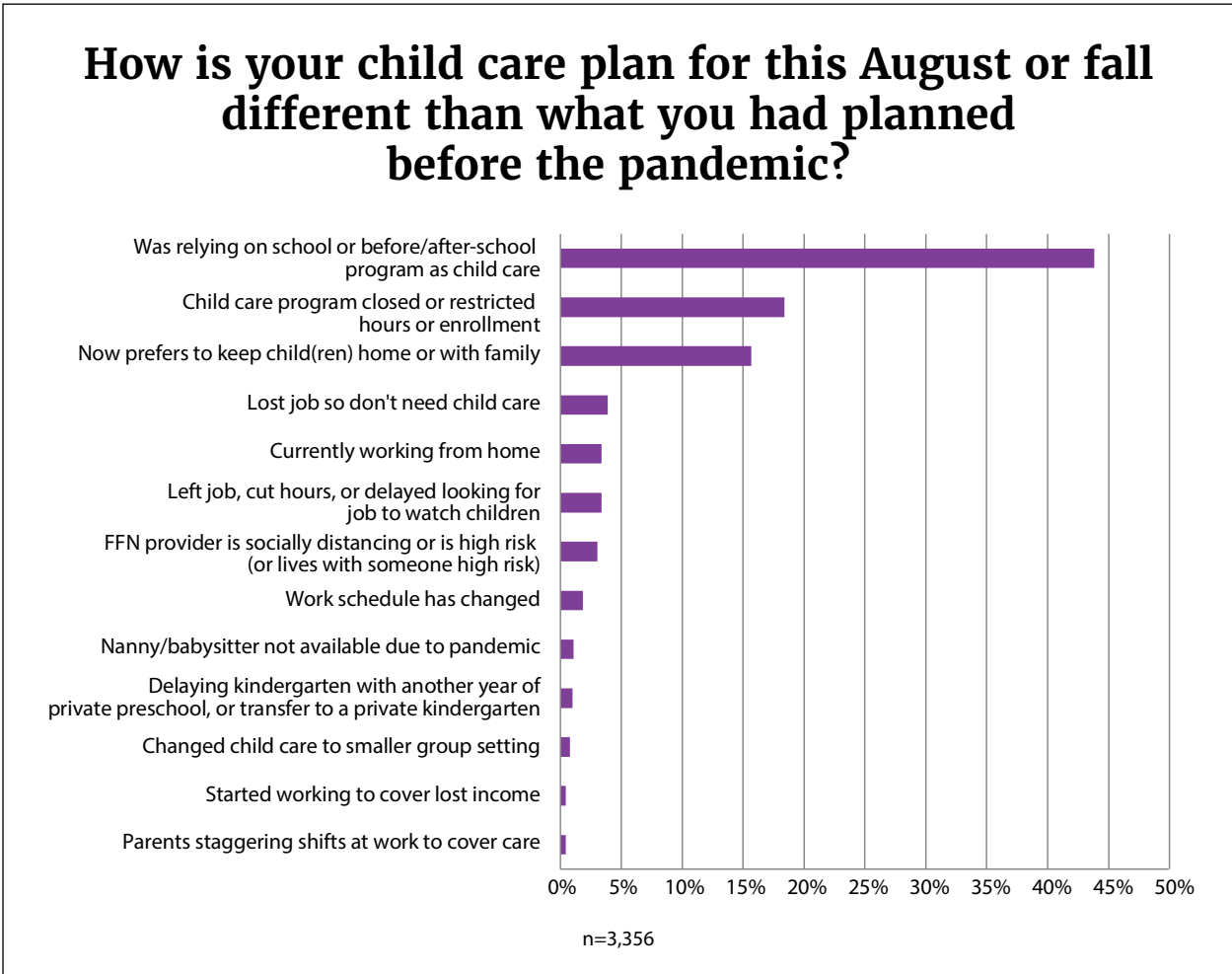


34% of respondents plan on using a child care center, 22% plan on using a family, friend, or neighbor, and 21% plan on using a family child care home. 28% were not sure what their plan was.

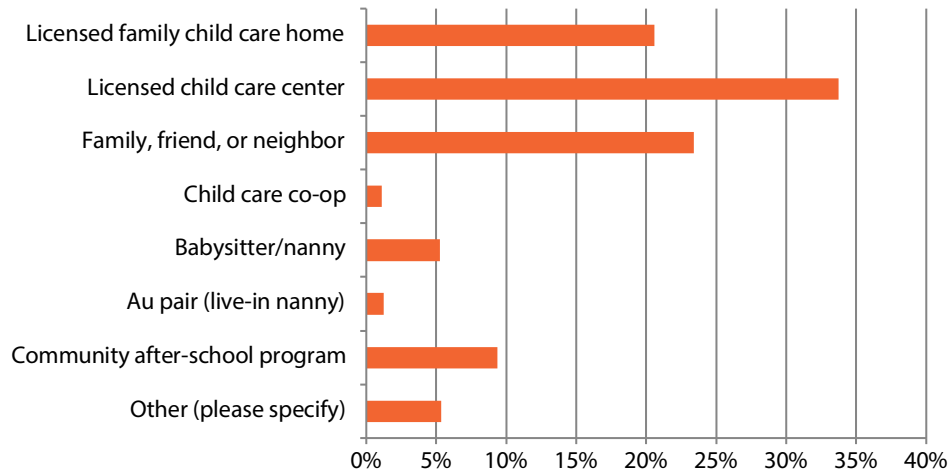
Is this different than what you were planning to use before the pandemic?



For those who said their child care plan had changed, when asked in an open-ended question to describe how it had changed, the top three responses were: parent was relying on school or before/after-school care as child care (44%), their child care program had closed or reduced their hours or enrollment (18%), and parent was not comfortable sending their child to any group care, so now prefers to keep them at home or with family (16%).



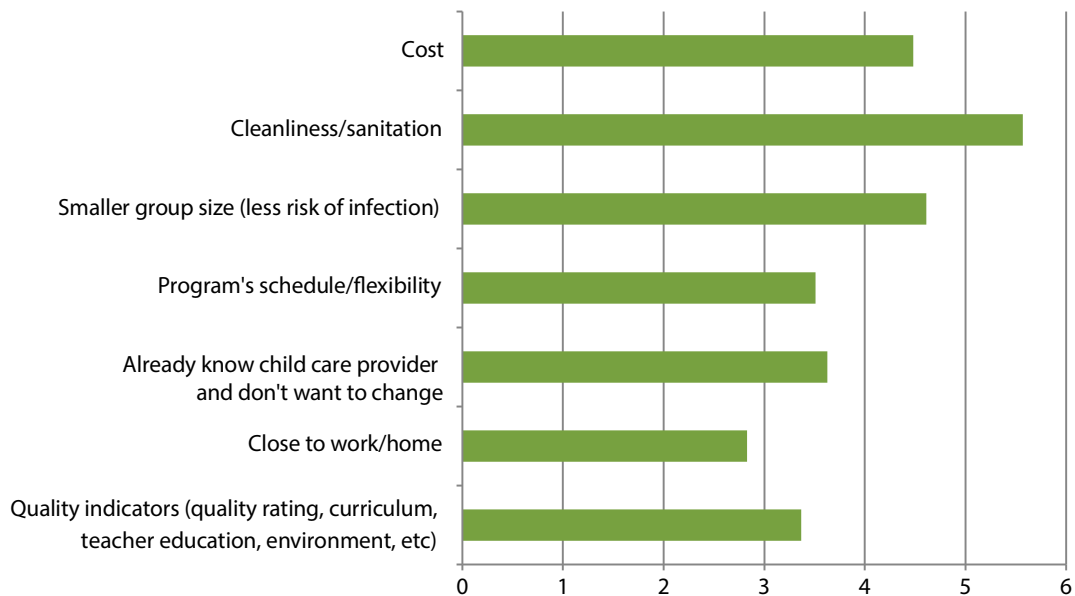
If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?



n=9,446

34% of respondents were most comfortable with a child care center, 24% with a family, friend, or neighbor, and 21% with a family child care home.

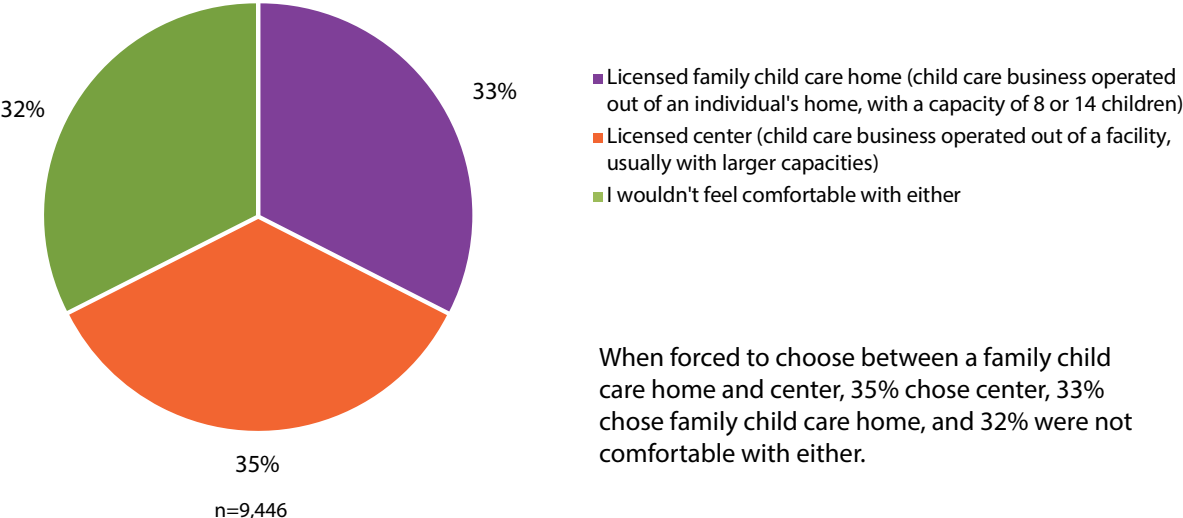
What factors are most important to you in choosing a child care setting right now?



n=9,446

When asked to rank the above factors, the top factor was cleanliness/sanitation, followed by smaller group size and cost.

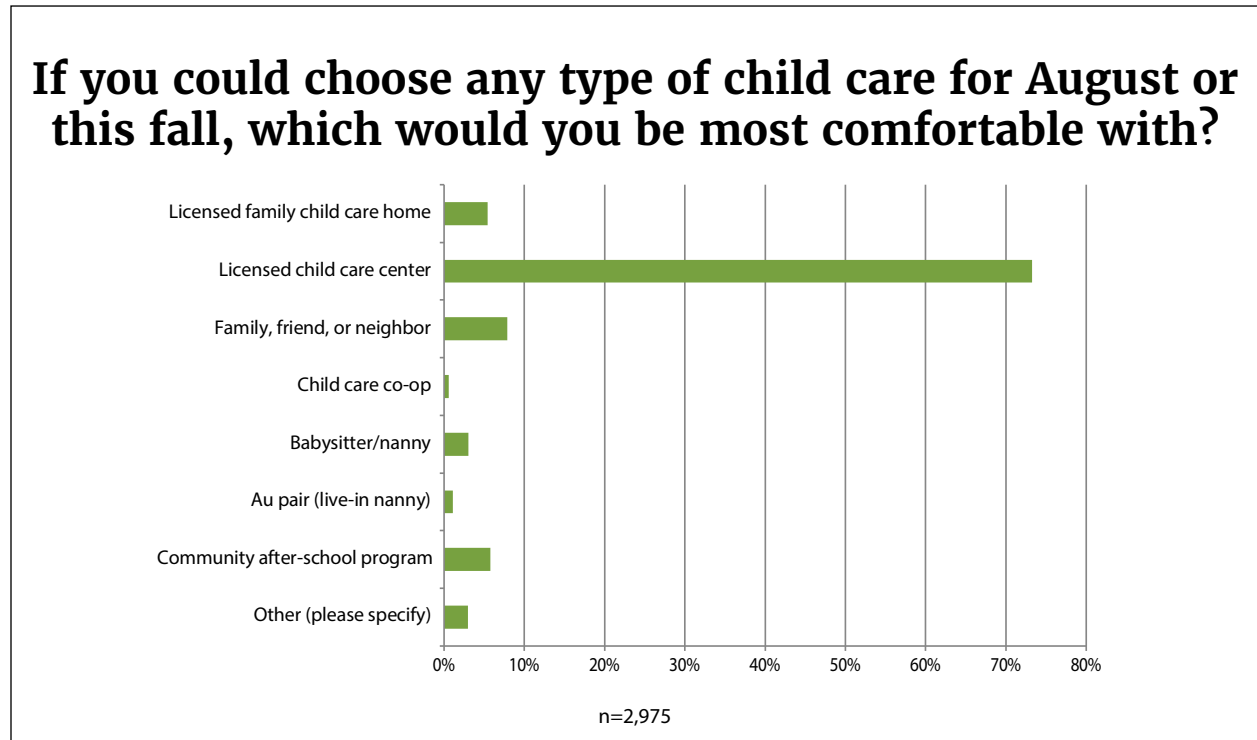
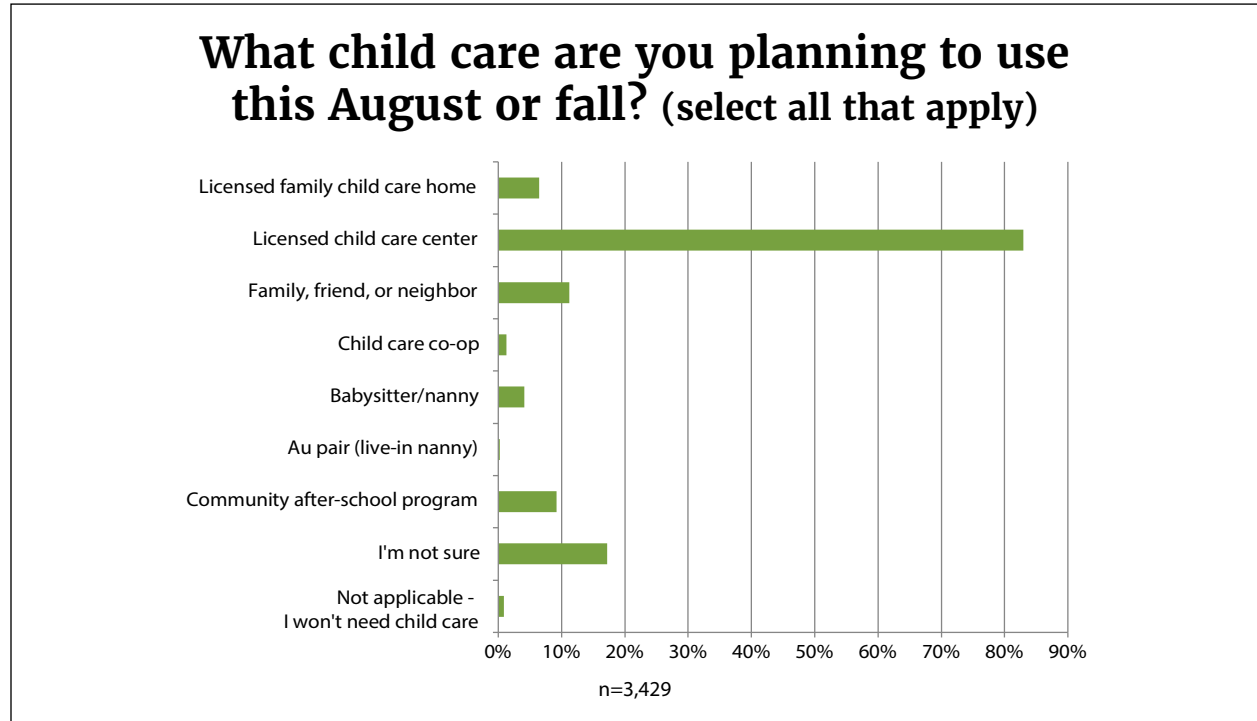
Which child care setting would you feel more comfortable sending your child to right now?



Child Care Plans and Preferences

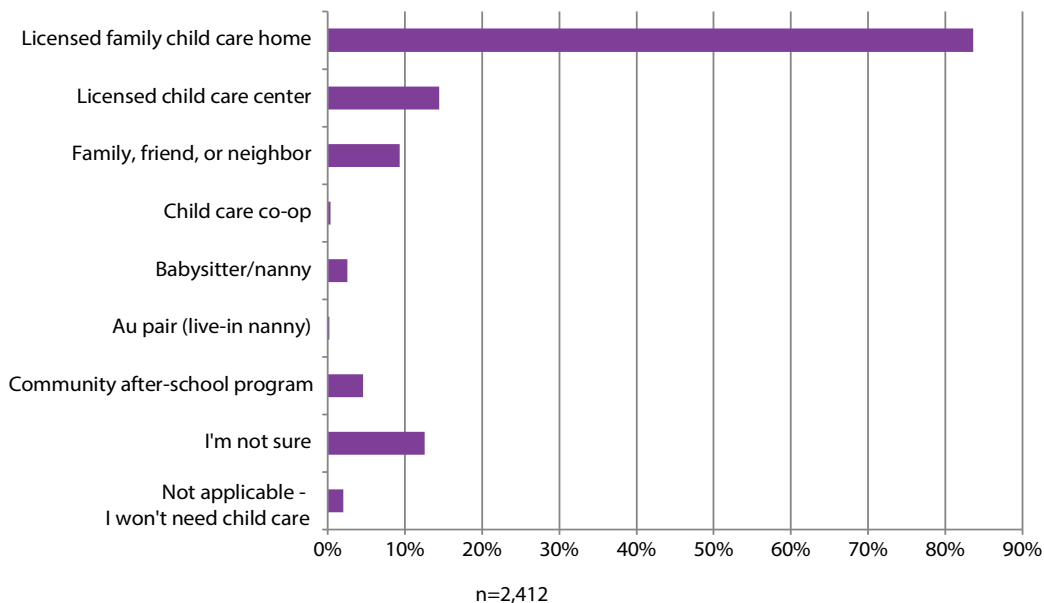
For the most part, people plan to use and prefer to use the setting they're already in (ex. people in a center plan to use a center and preference is for center). For those who don't currently have child care and are working, or those without child care who don't need it, the majority are not sure of their plans. Their preferences are as follows: family, friend, or neighbor (FFN), child care center, community after school program, then family child care home (FCC).

CURRENT CENTER USERS

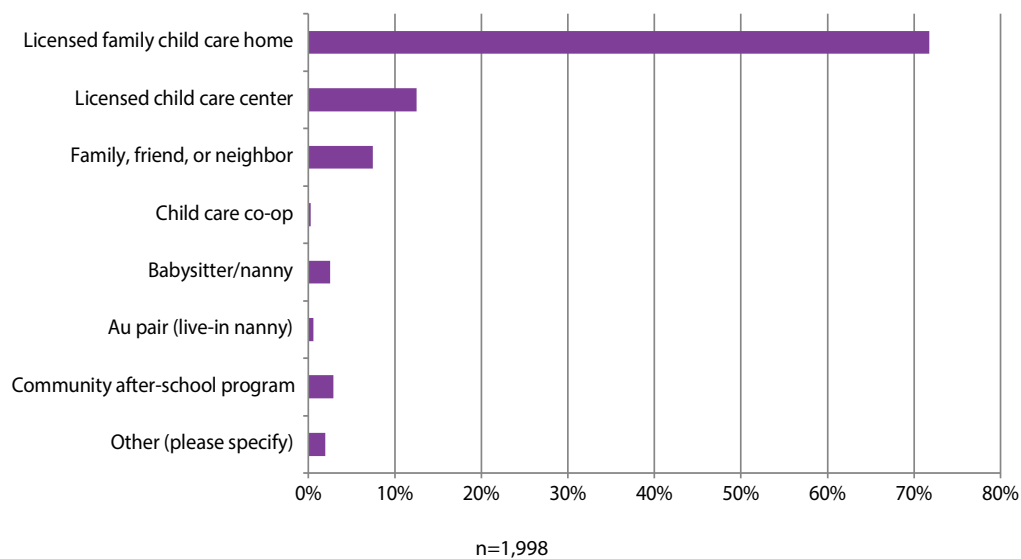


CURRENT FCC USERS

What child care are you planning to use this August or fall? (select all that apply)

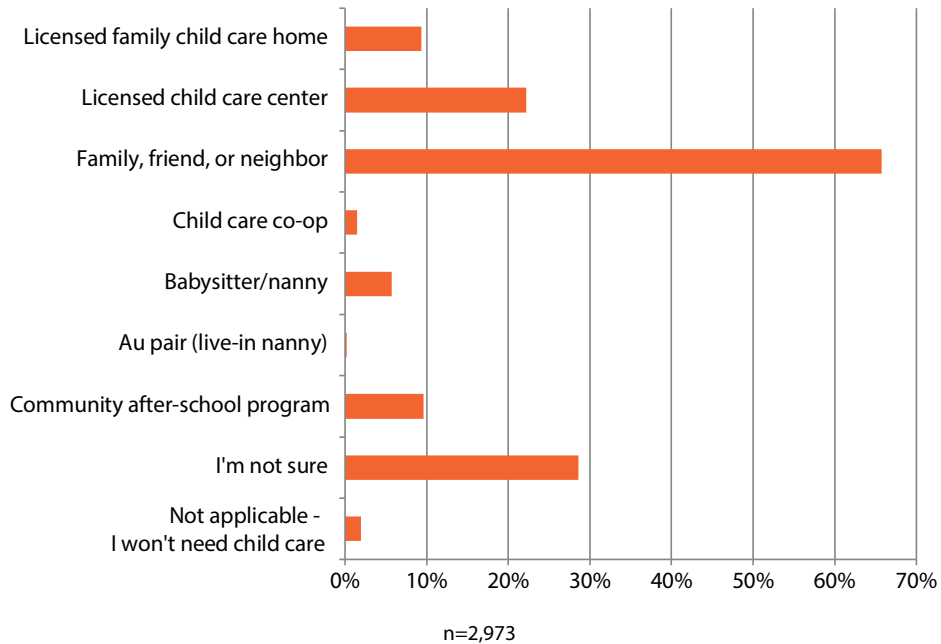


If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?

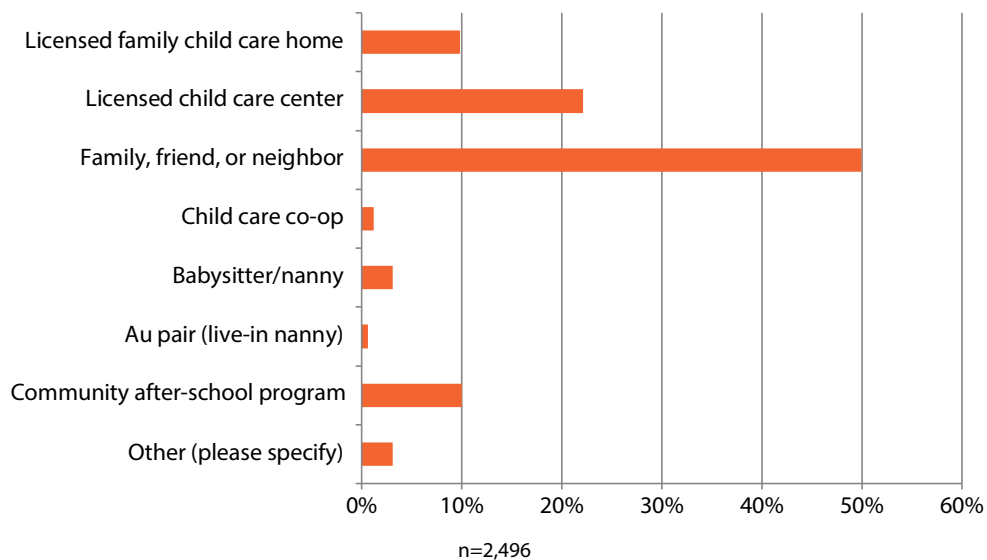


CURRENT FFN USERS

What child care are you planning to use this August or fall? (select all that apply)

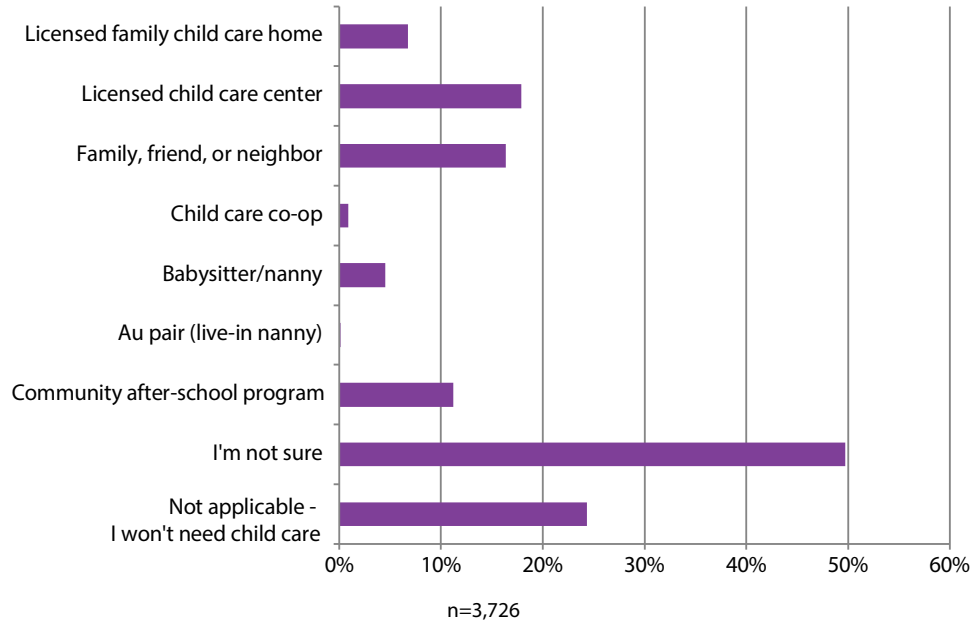


If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?

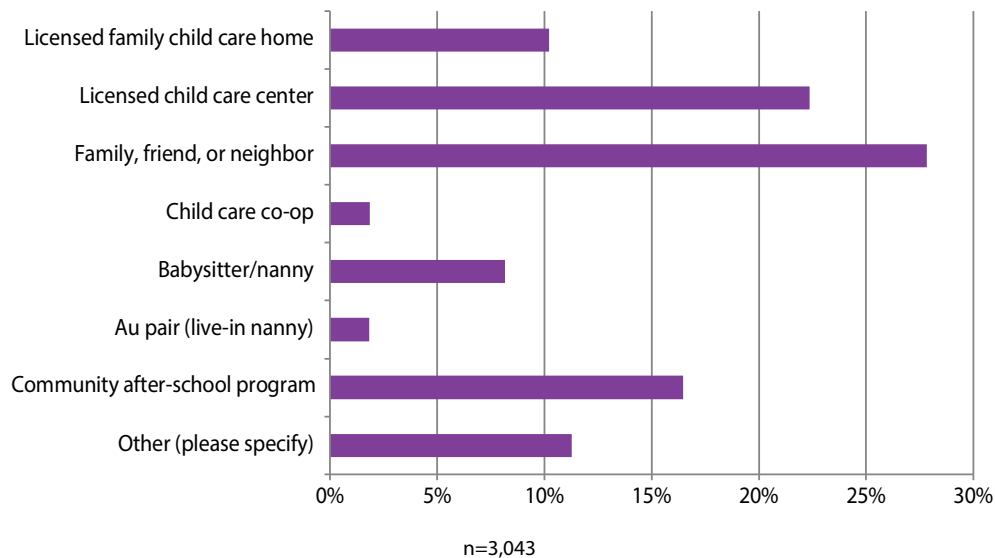


CURRENTLY DON'T HAVE OR NEED CHILD CARE

What child care are you planning to use this August or fall? (select all that apply)



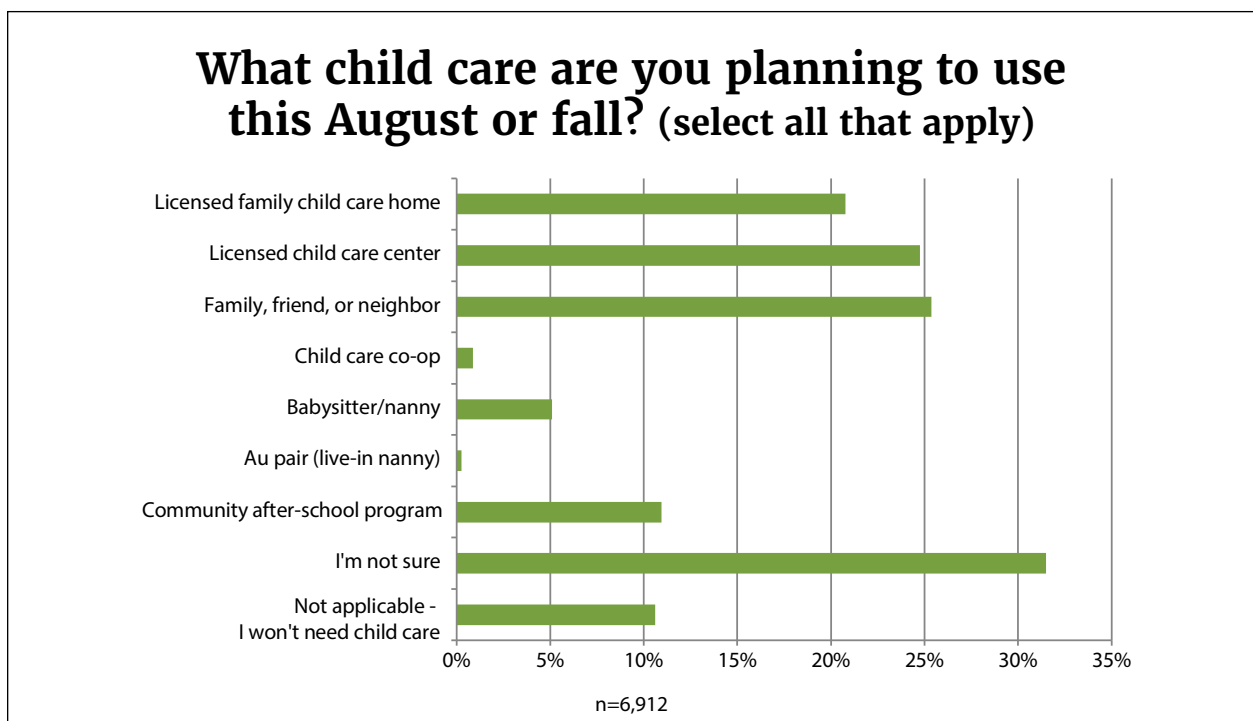
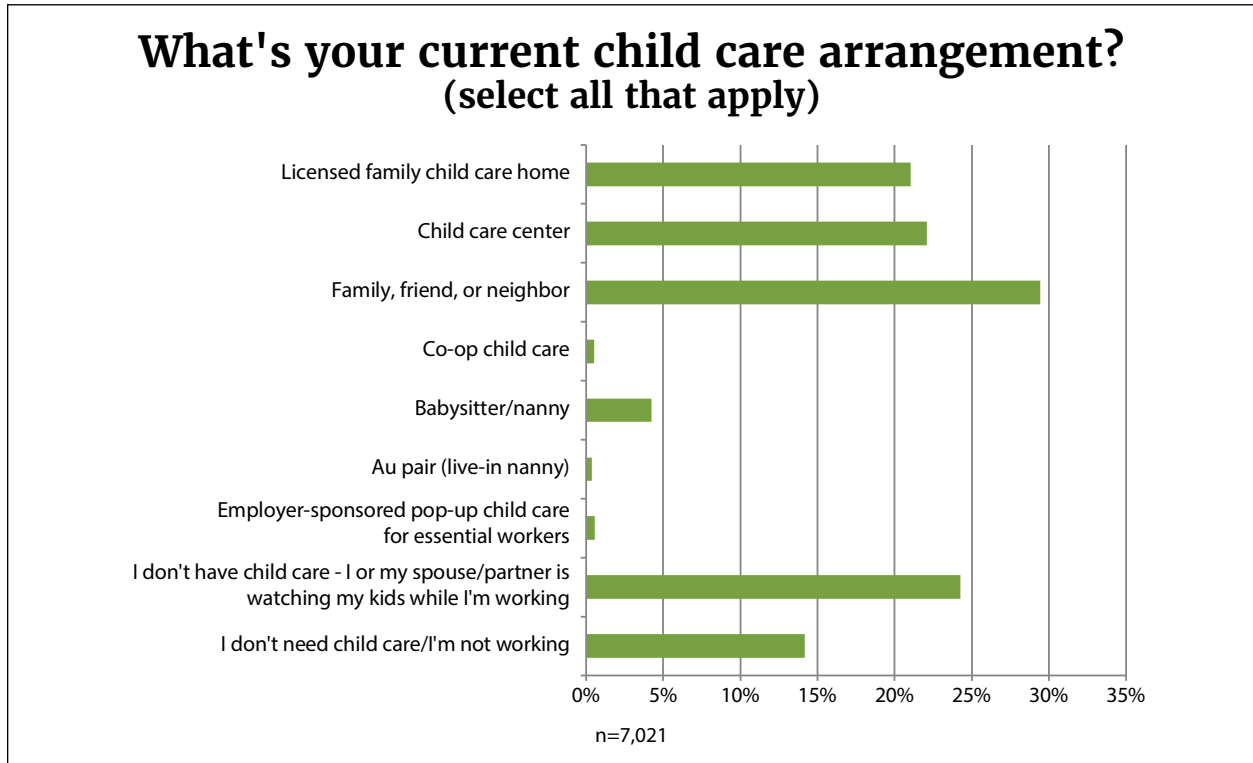
If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?



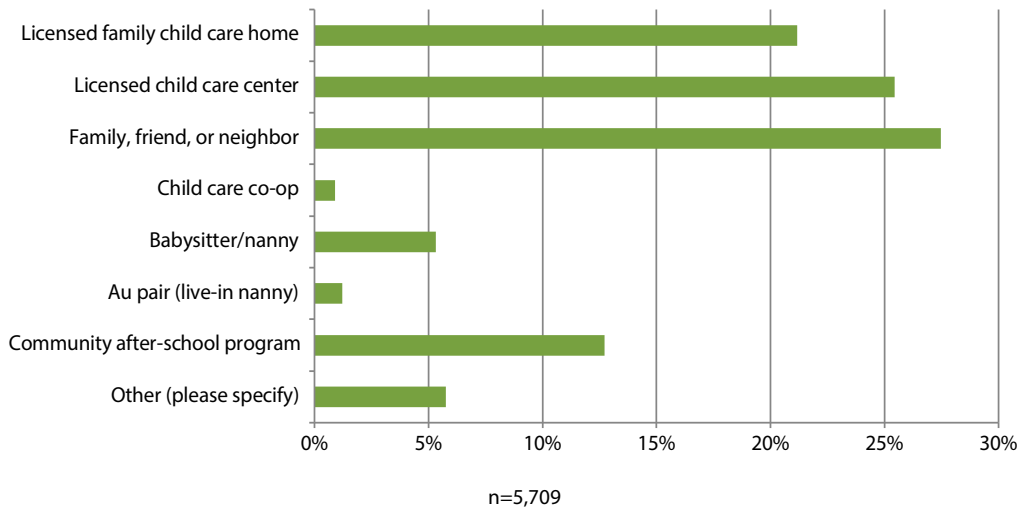
Arrangements, Plans, and Preferences by Age Group

For those with at least one child under two, or two to five, the current arrangements, plans, and preferences followed a similar pattern to the aggregate results (center, FFN, FCC). For those with at least one school-aged child, there was much more FFN use, and FFN ranked higher in plans and preferences:

AT LEAST ONE CHILD 6-12



If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?

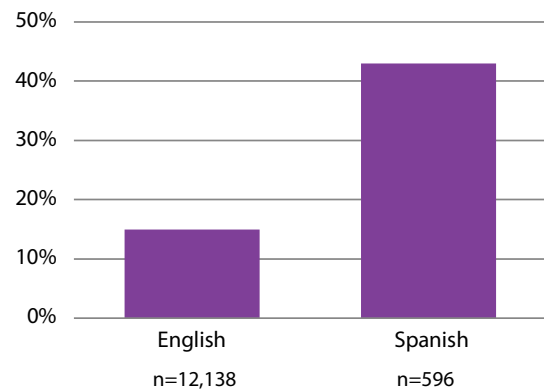


Job Loss and Preference by Language

There was a large discrepancy found between those who have lost their jobs or been furloughed when comparing those who filled out the survey in English versus Spanish. This is not necessarily indicative of race or ethnicity, and represents only the language in which the participant chose to complete the survey.

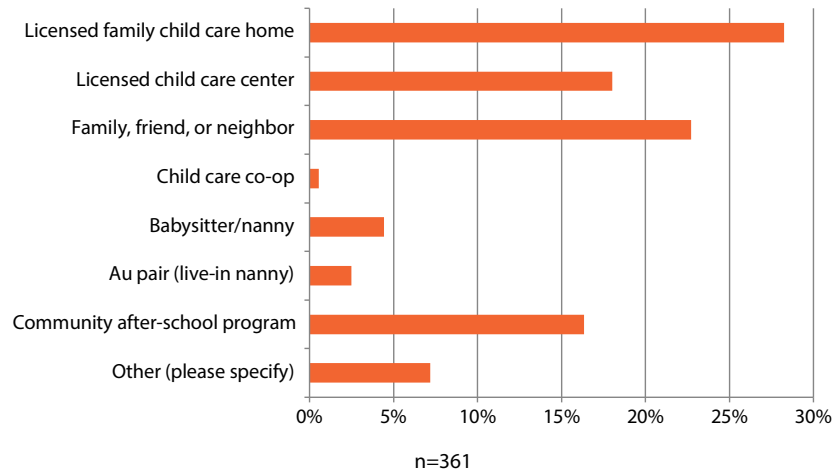
43% of respondents who completed the survey in Spanish, and 15% who completed it in English had lost their job or been furloughed.

Lost job or furloughed



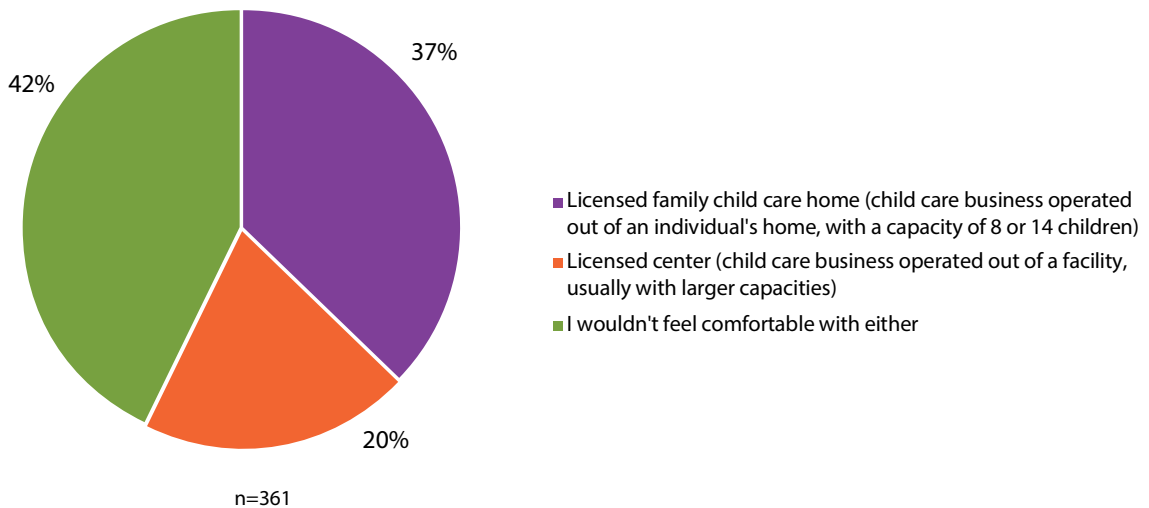
Respondents who completed the survey in Spanish showed a different pattern of child care use and preference, preferring family child care homes first, followed by FFN and then center:

If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?



When asked if they would be most comfortable with a family child care home, center, or neither, almost half (42%) said they would not feel comfortable with either:

Which child care setting would you feel more comfortable sending your child to right now?

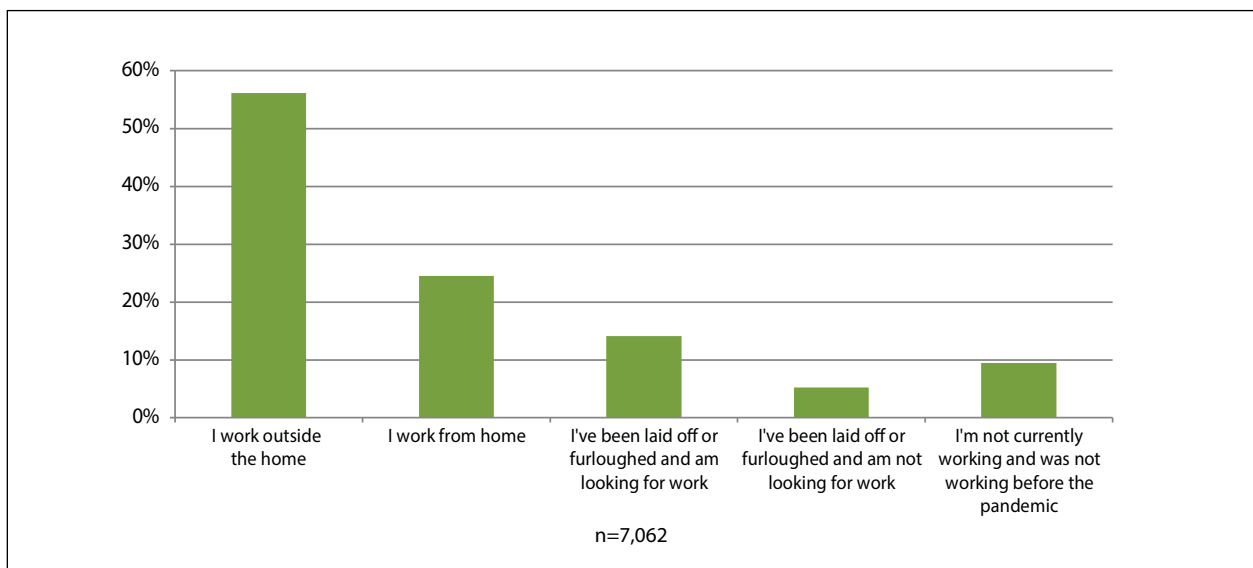


Results by Income

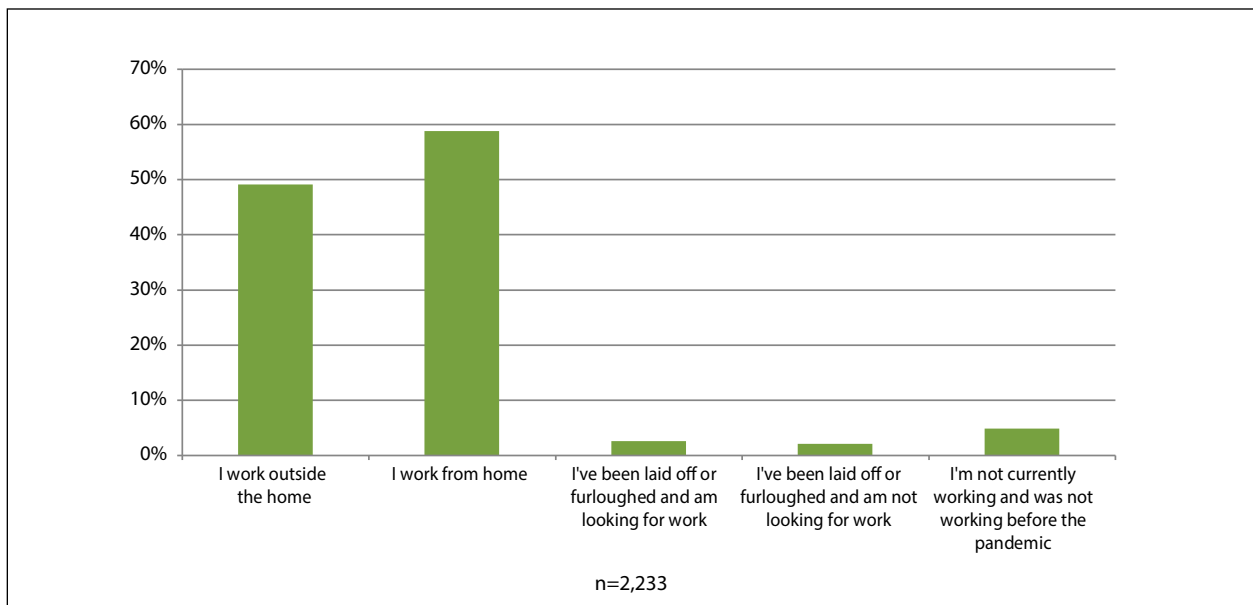
When results were disaggregated by income (Under \$50,000, \$50,000-\$100,000, over \$100,000) similar patterns were found between the under \$50,000 group and the \$50,000-\$100,000 group. In comparing the under \$100,000 group to the over \$100,000 group, the under \$100,000 group showed: majority working outside the home, more FFN use, majority stated that their child care plans had not changed due to the pandemic, and when forced to choose between center and FCC, there was a preference for FCC. In the over \$100,000 group, the majority are working from home, more are watching their children at home, there's a strong preference for centers, and more stated that their child care plans had changed because of the pandemic, and when forced to choose between center and FCC there was a preference for center.

What is your current work situation? (select all that apply)

UNDER \$100,000

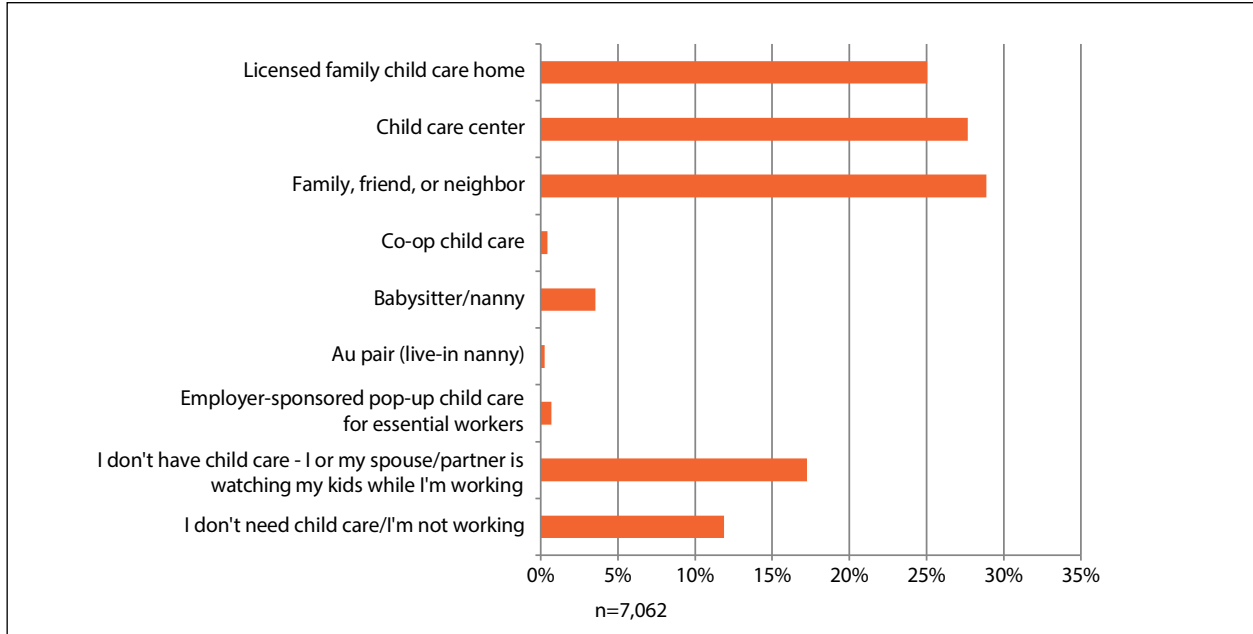


OVER \$100,000

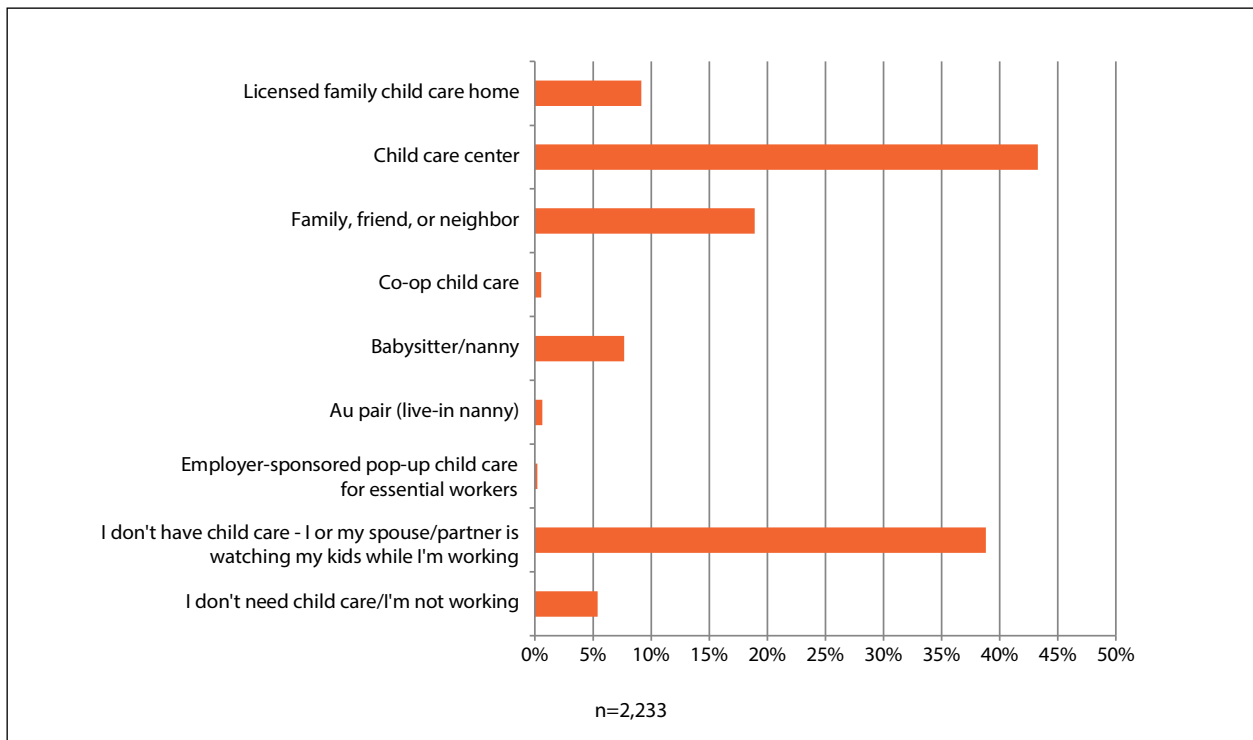


What's your current child care arrangement? (select all that apply)

UNDER \$100,000

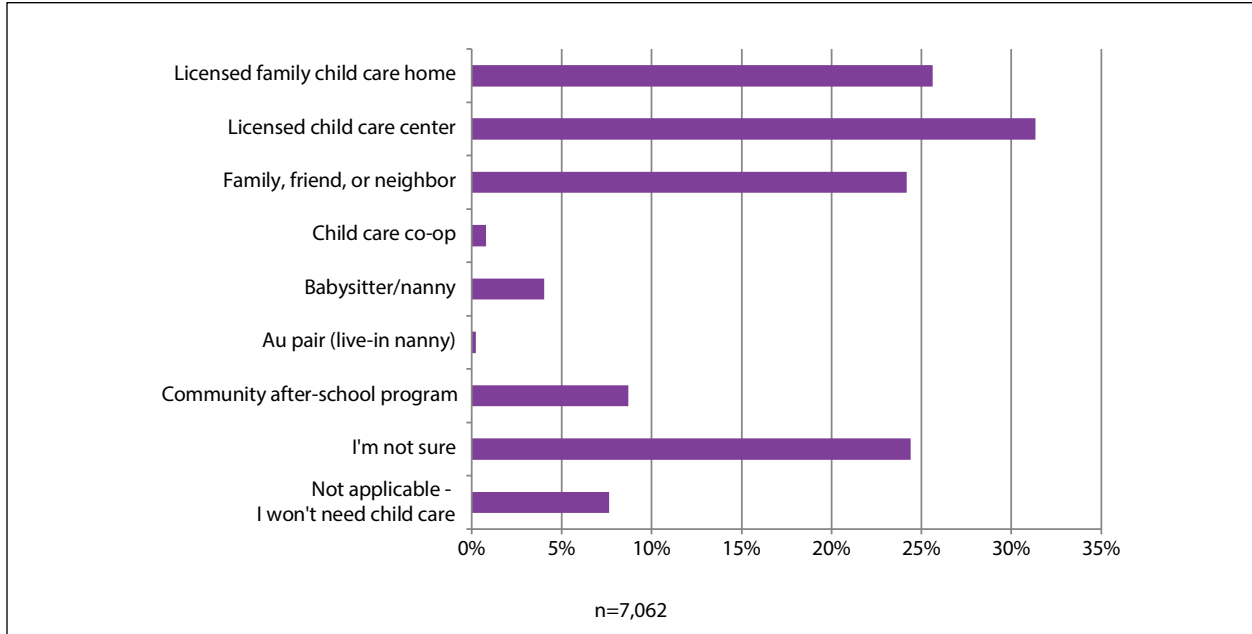


OVER \$100,000

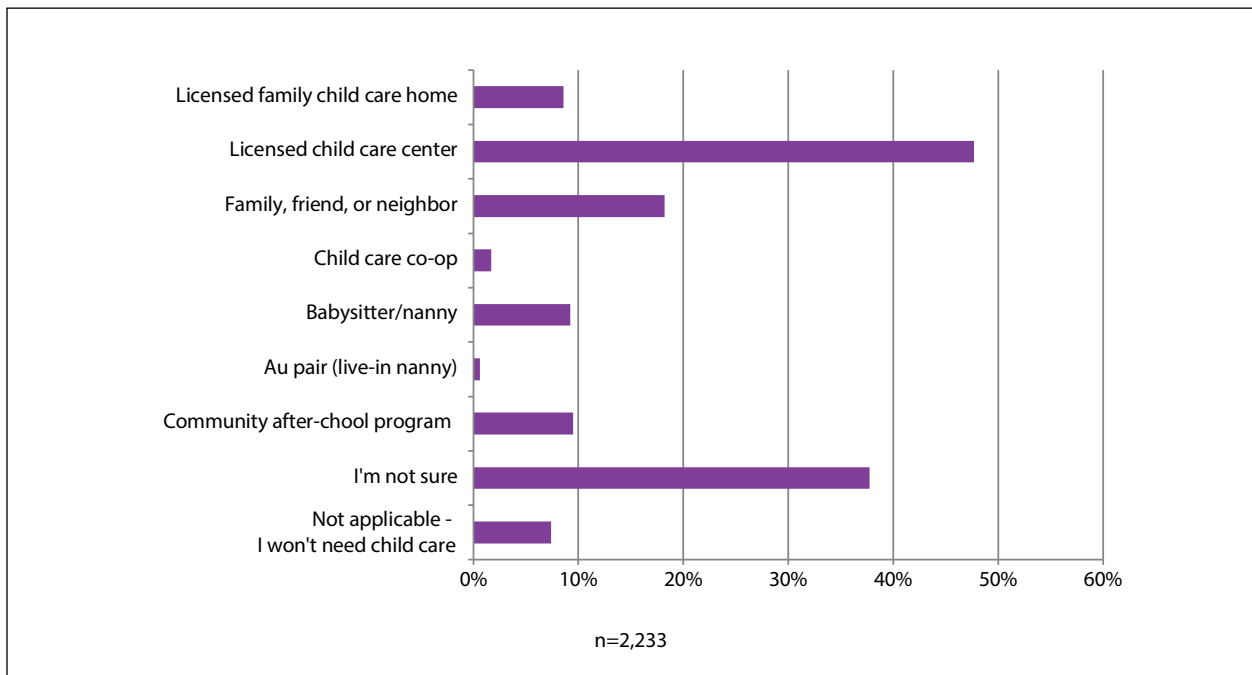


What child care are you planning to use this August or fall? (select all that apply)

UNDER \$100,000

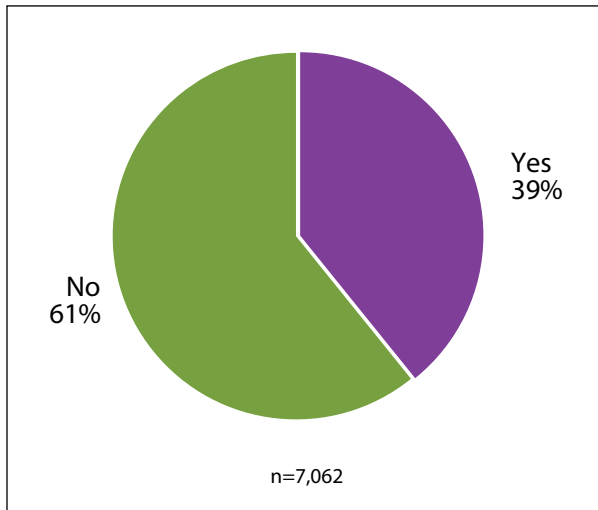


OVER \$100,000

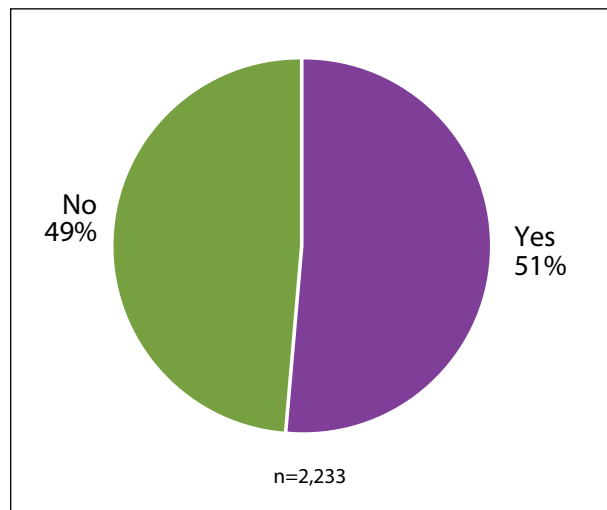


Is this different than what you were planning to use before the pandemic?

UNDER \$100,000

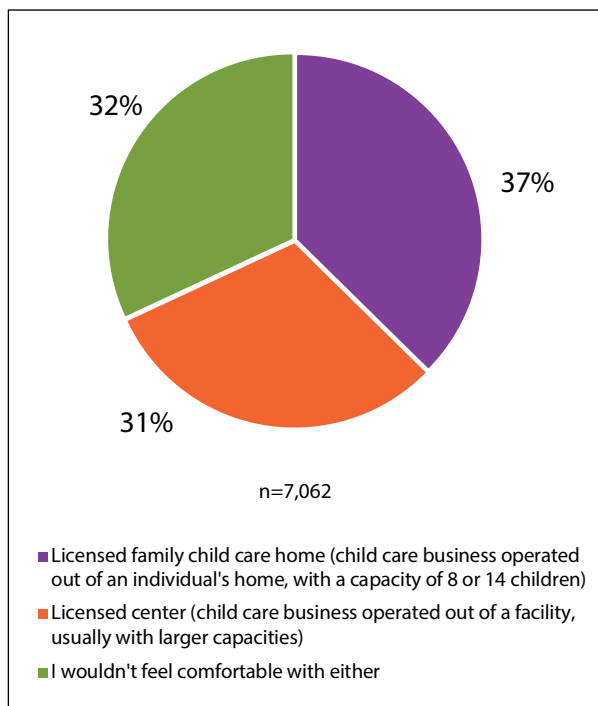


OVER \$100,000

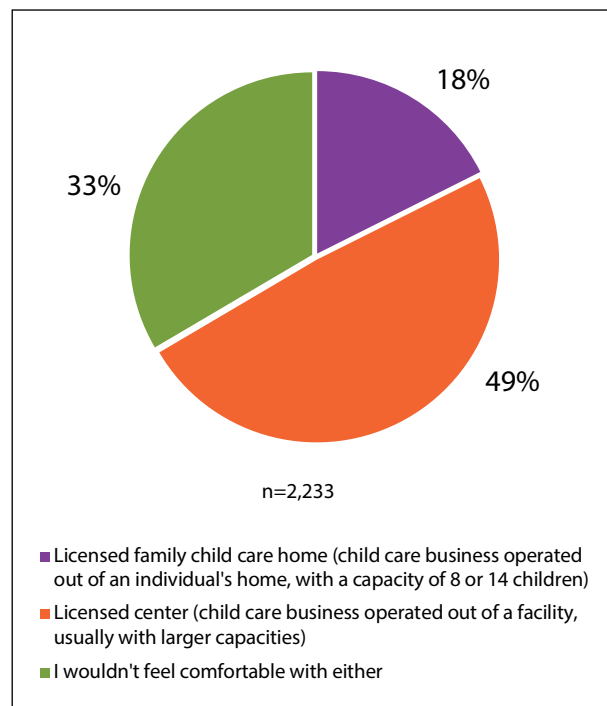


Which child care setting would you feel more comfortable sending your child to right now?

UNDER \$100,000

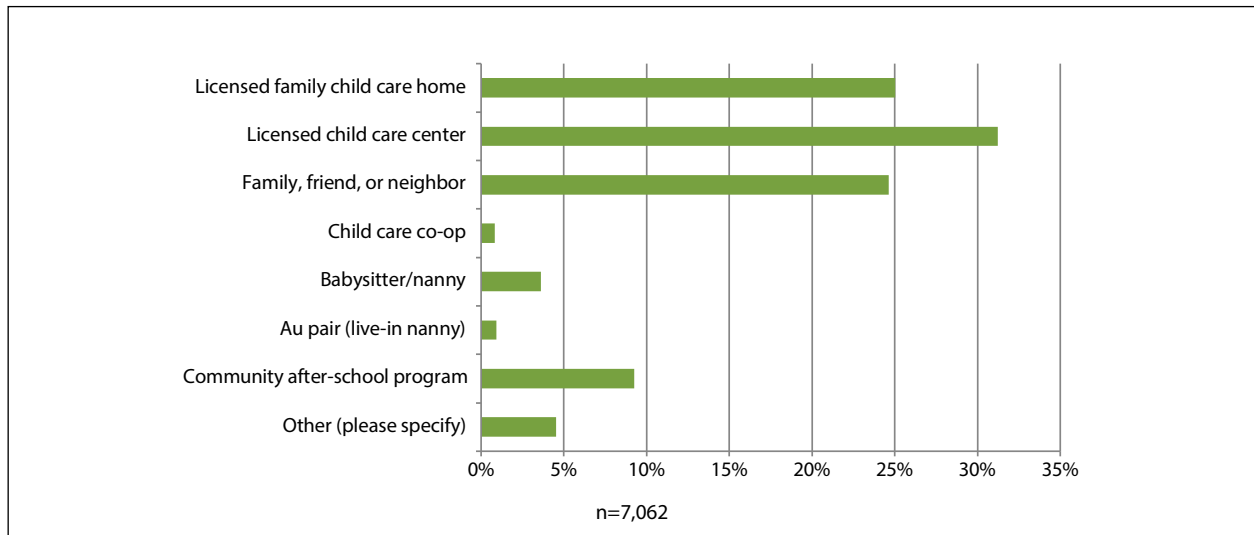


OVER \$100,000

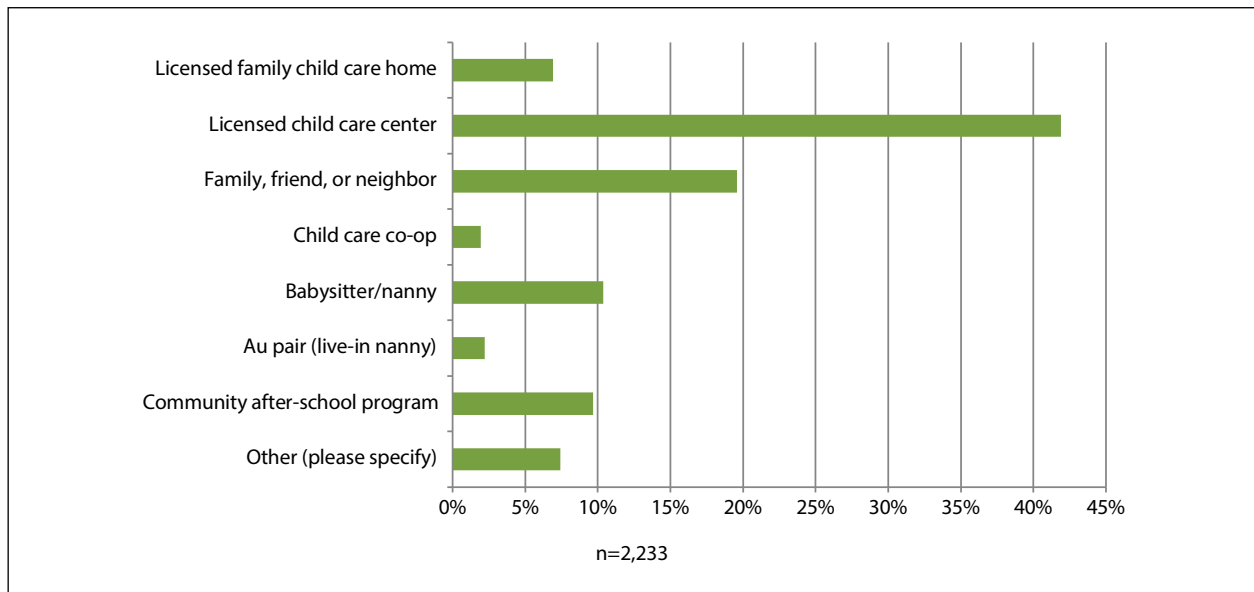


If you could choose any type of child care for August or this fall, which would you be most comfortable with?

UNDER \$100,000



OVER \$100,000

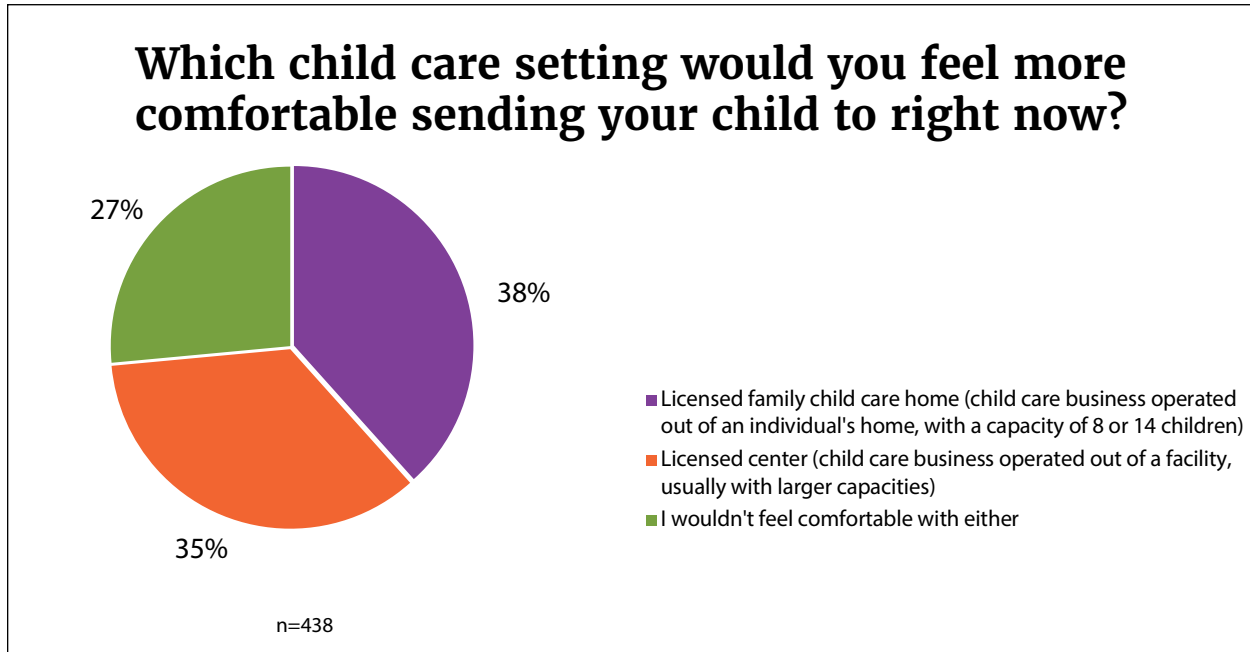


Use and Preference by Region

When child care preferences were compared across four regions in California,¹ the following differences were found when compared to the statewide patterns:

NORTH

When forced to choose between FCC or center, there was a slight preference for FCC:



¹ Four regions are defined as follows:

North: Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Yuba

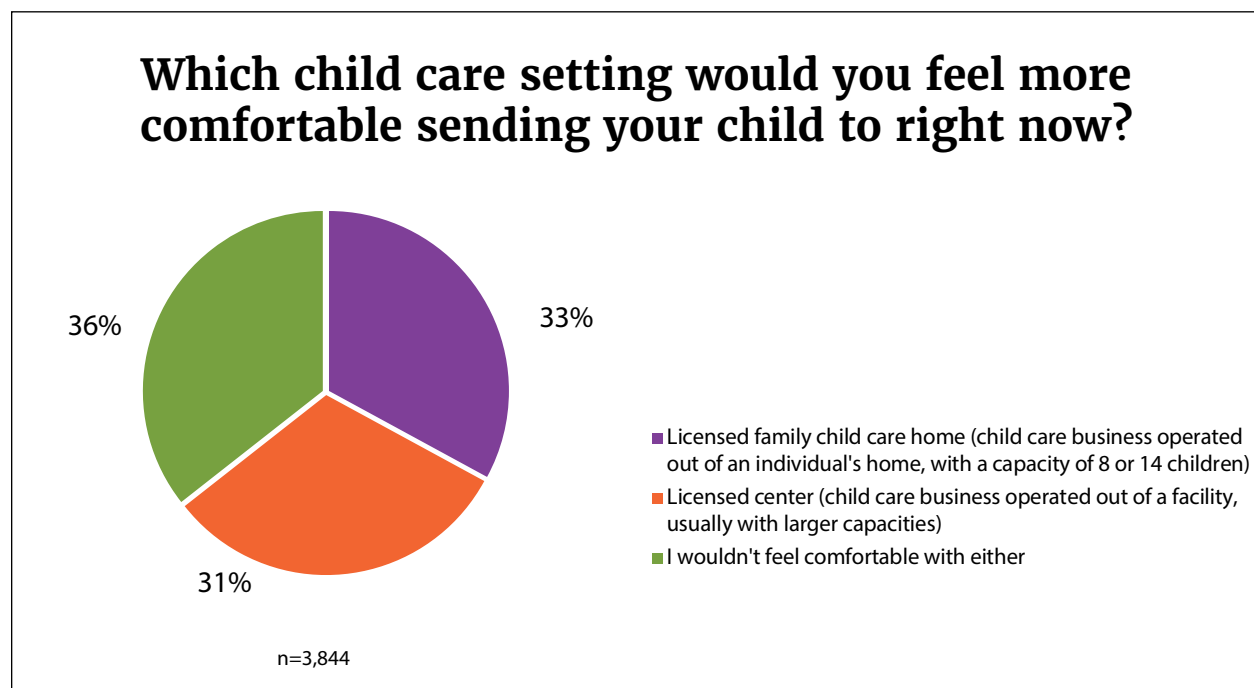
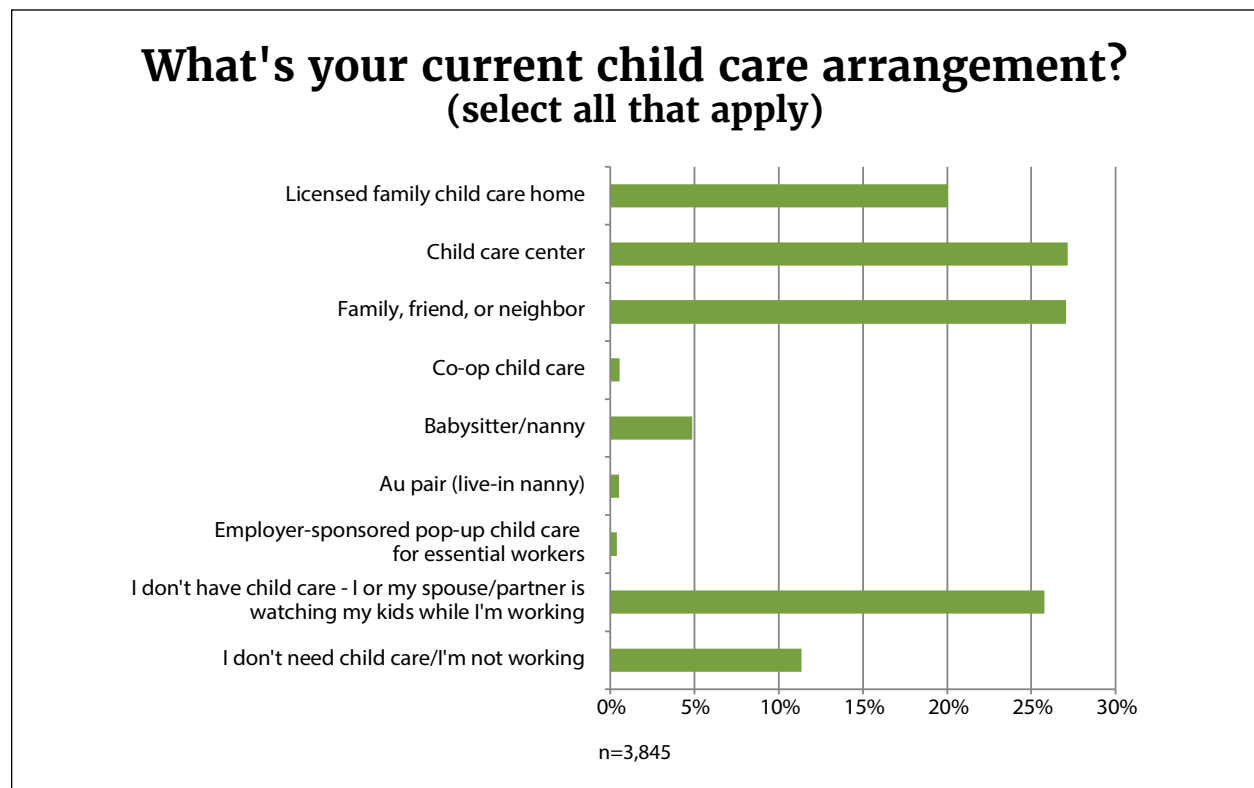
Bay Area: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Yolo

Central Valley: Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono, Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolumne

South: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Ventura

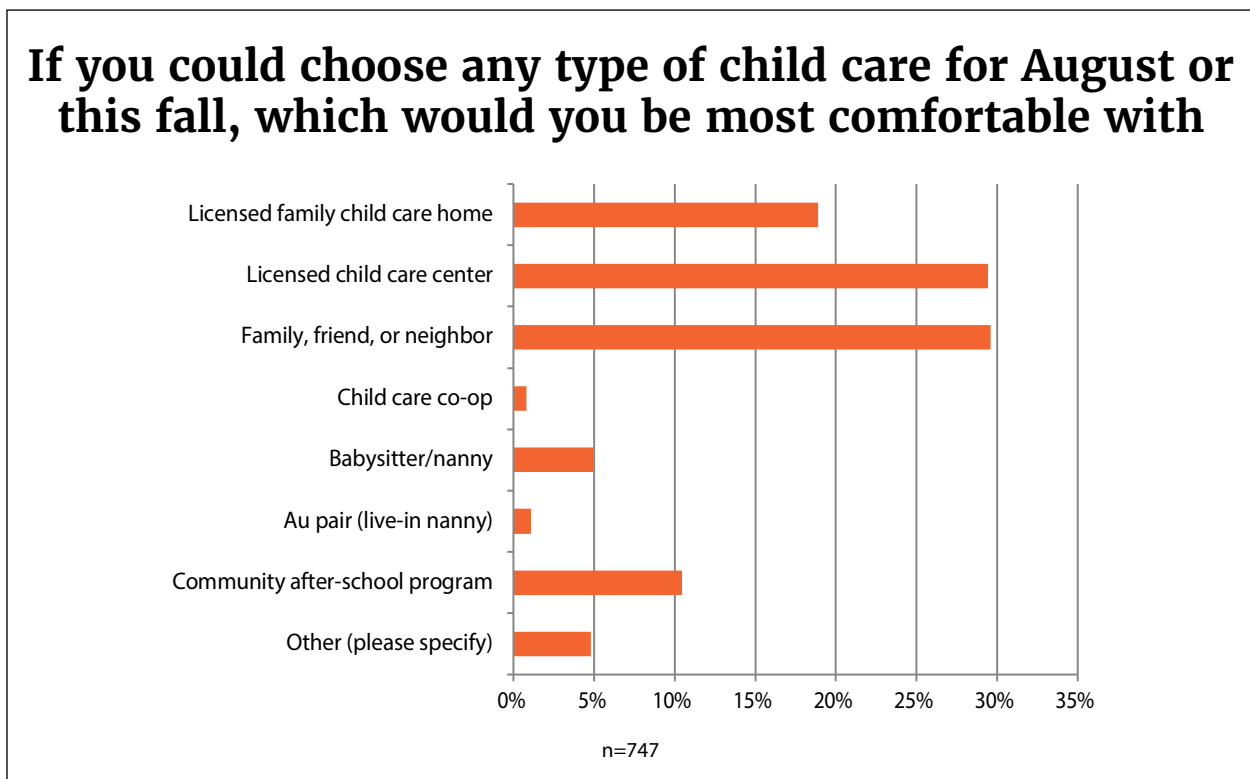
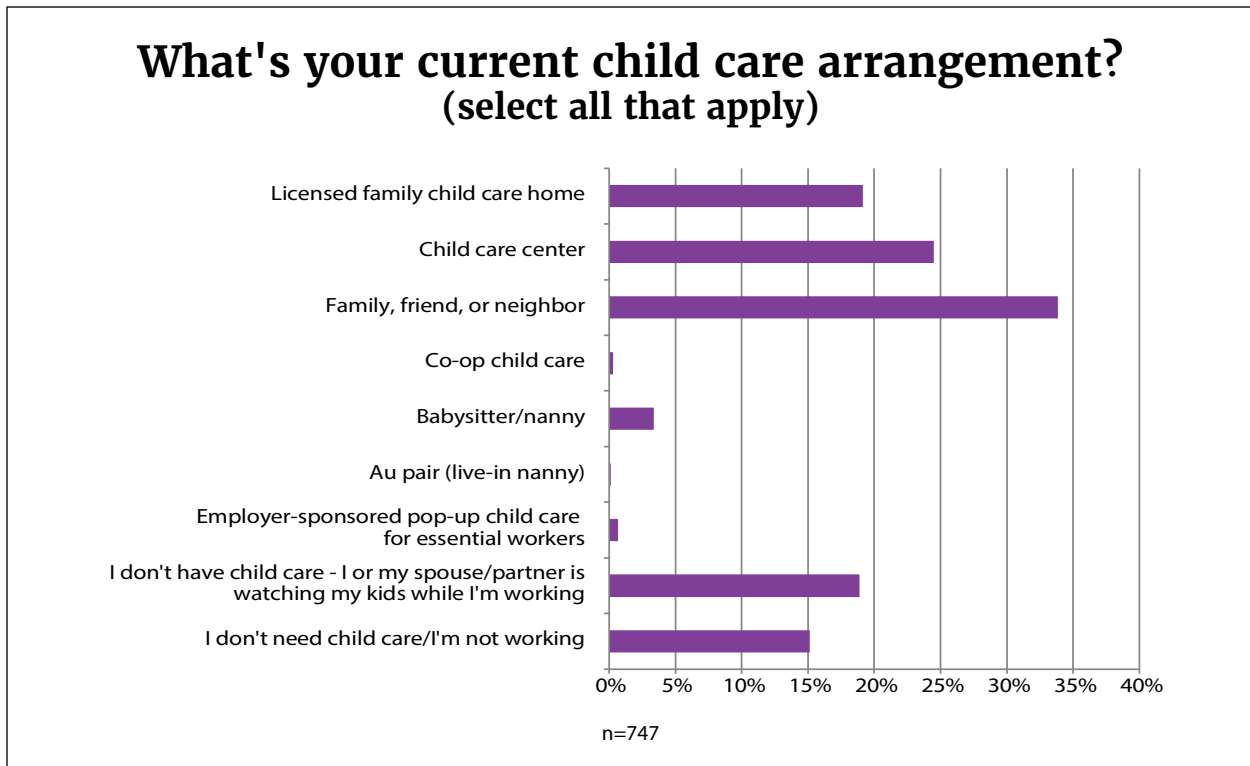
BAY AREA

The Bay Area showed higher use of FFN care (tied with center as first), a high number of parents watching their children at home while they work, and many would not feel comfortable with either a center or an FCC:

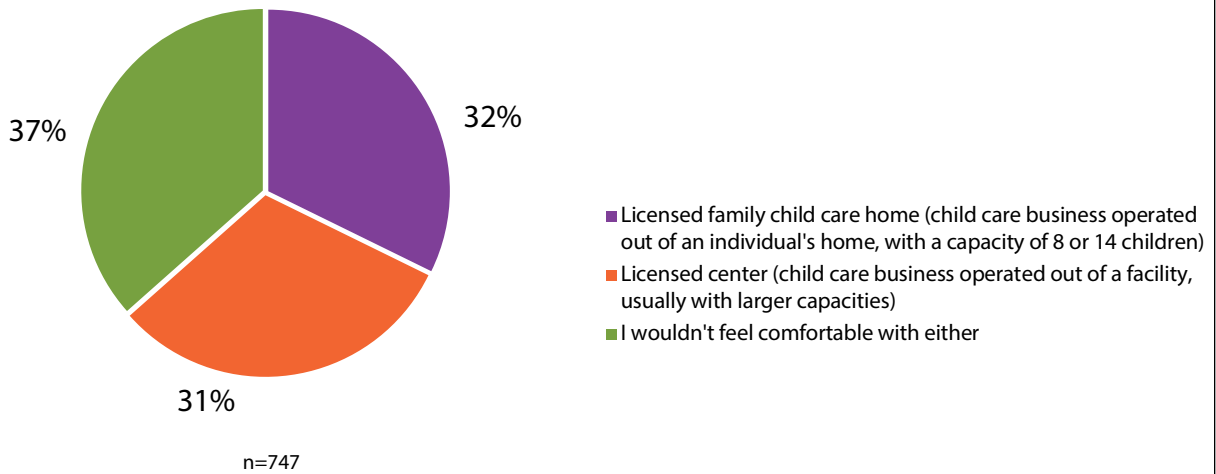


CENTRAL VALLEY

The Central Valley showed very high FFN use, a preference for FFN care, and many would not feel comfortable with either a center or an FCC:



Which child care setting would you feel more comfortable sending your child to right now?



SOUTH

Due to the large response rate from the south, the patterns are consistent with the statewide patterns.

Important Factors by Preference and Income

Regardless of preferred setting or income, all groups ranked the same top three factors as most important in choosing a child care setting now: cleanliness/sanitation, group size, and cost. Cleanliness/sanitation was the number one factors across all groups.

Qualitative Results from Open-Ended Questions

PARENT INSIGHTS

In the open-ended responses, parents consistently expressed frustration at school closures and the financial and logistical burden of child care being placed solely on them, especially during a time when many are making less money, fear of their child and their family contracting the virus, and anxiety around how they were going to piece everything together so that they can work. Some parents expressed uncertainty about being able to keep their child care subsidy, while others have had to quit their jobs entirely due to a lack of affordable or available child care.

“On grounds at school care was an integral part of our child care before and after school each day. My husband and I work full time. My 5 year is still at preschool but only until the school year begins and she will no longer be eligible to attend. Now my 8 & 5 year olds will be at home for school and no adult at home to be there with him. I do not know what we are going to do and it is incredibly anxiety ridden not just for us but for our children as well. We cannot give them an answer to ease their minds. It is heartbreaking.”

“I might have to quit my job because I wont have day care for kids since schools are not opening up in my area. No afterschool programs. Neighbors have kids who will also be doing remote learning and it's hard to add 2 additional children for then to help and watch. This is extremely difficult situation and my anxiety is off the charts.”

“I need 50% more childcare than I did before and have to pay 50% more, but am making less money than before.”

“Business has almost come to a halt. I've managed to cover childcare up till July 30 so I could strategize new ways to create income. I was looking forward to my children going to TK to help with having time to work and children are also more than ready to begin school. I have enough funds to survive until January but will have to juggle children and homeschooling and somehow work. I currently have no idea how to keep my head above water with no childcare coverage for the next year when hopefully they will

be able to go to kindergarten. As the sole provider and only parent for my children, for the first time I am truly scared without having some form of childcare assistance.”

“My children used to go to a child care center for fulltime and afterschool care for this school year we decided go on with the virtual learning due to covid 19 and health issues for my children. As a full time working parents and a essential worker and earning minimum wage I have to cut my hours of work in order to cater my children's education. I hope the government will come up for some help regarding this matter. Any help could give is much appreciated.”

“We were using the boys and girls club for after school care. Wife and I both work in hospitals and not able to be with the kids at home. We have no family in town and have NO IDEA what we are going to do in August.”

“I need childcare and can't find it. I work full time. I literally came one minute from giving my children away to the police in the spring it was so stressful I did not know what to do.”

“While I am not an essential worker, my job is not the kind of job you can do working from home, and it requires me to be at the office. I am a single mother with full-custody, and no family in the area. I already spent my savings from shelter-in-place. I am nervous that I will have to resign or lose my job because of my daughter's homeschool situation. If that happens, I will be evicted. I need help so that I can actually pay the bills. I also want my child to be safe and am unsure if [school district] is capable of keeping our children (and teachers) safe and healthy.”

“My child's school and child center is closed down. But at the moment I am working from home and she is home with me. But I don't want to lose my subsidy.”

When asked to describe why they chose their preferred child care setting, several themes emerged. Many parents mentioned trusting people they already know to follow cleaning, safety, and social distancing protocols, whether it's a child care provider or family, friend, or neighbor.

LICENSED CHILD CARE CENTER

When forced to choose between a family child care home or center and asked why they selected that option, those who chose center described feeling more comfortable because parents perceived that centers follow regulations and guidelines, are more clean/sanitized, have more space and seem more professional than other types of care. have control and limit who enters the premises, have a curriculum, and can help with homework.

"Safety of my children, including sanitation, training of staff, and my ability to view my children on camera."

"Sanitation, higher-level policies."

"I want to make sure the center is cleaned daily, temperatures checked, masks worn and children practicing social distancing and continued hand washing."

"Control of those on site allowed in and out of facility, extensive back ground checks, drug testing, cameras."

"Sanitation. I don't trust people's homes."

"Better education and learning environment. Regulated cleaning and class number sizes."

"Because only workers who are trained to care for children and have thorough background checks are allowed in the building. There is never a situation at a care center where my child is alone with an adult. I don't trust child care at someone's home. I worry about unregulated access to my child if people visit the home who are friends and family of the person running the home day care."

"Licensed facilities are monitored closer and are in the public eye which makes it more comfortable."

"Centers seem to have more professional setting than those licensed family child care homes; they are usually a franchise and follow more universal rules, where family running care homes have their own unique regulations."

LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME

For those who chose family child care home in the forced choice, parents mentioned feeling more comfortable because they have smaller group size, they trust their cleanliness and sanitation practices, there's better communications with the providers and other parents, they already know and trust the provider, and they're allowed to enter the facility.

"The lower number of kids and employees and the ability to sanitize better since groups are low."

"I would prefer smaller more homelike setting."

"Smaller group setting and greater control and communication with teacher and other parents."

"It is a smaller setting and usually the same group of children hopefully with parents and a provider with similar safety precautions as we are taking to ensure our children are safe."

"Sanitation, less children, have known care provider more than 20 years."

"My provider is like my family to me and my children."

FAMILY, FRIEND, OR NEIGHBOR

When asked to describe in more detail their preferred child care setting, those who were most comfortable with an FFN provider described being uncomfortable sending their child to any group setting right now, but they need child care help and having a family member or friend provide care seemed like the safest option, since they know and trust the adults and they're the only child or there's a very small group of children. Some parents expressed concern about the vulnerability of this FFN provider in getting COVID-19, or their ability to help their child with distance learning, due to limited English or technology capacity.

"I only have my mom babysit or my sister and they both live together and social distance. I want my children as safe as possible and I feel that's with me with the help from my mom, her grandma while working from home."

"I prefer my kids stay with family that I trust and know are being careful not to get infected with COVID."

"I feel like it is highly risky to send children to school setting or public setting and would prefer someone I knew and my children knew."

"We would normally have after school help from family; however, due to the pandemic and members of our extended family being "high risk" we have had to scramble to find care for the kids."

"Before my mother would watch them for a three hour block between my spouse and my schedule or the boys would come to my work and hangout. But because I work in healthcare it is not safe to be at my work or safe to be around my diabetic mother with the amount of exposure I have."

"My son has sensitive lungs and I feel uncomfortable sending him back to daycare. I work and attend school from home so I am able to care for him but it is extremely difficult to manage all 3. By not sending my son back, will it affect my status with [subsidy]?"

"I had planned for my children to be able to go back to school. I am a single full-time working mother and I'm afraid I'm going to lose my job if they are not in school. I have a tremendous amount of anxiety about trying to work from home and homeschool AGAIN. It was near impossible to do last time and I thought I was going to have a mental breakdown from all the stress. I want everyone to be safe and healthy, but I also need to provide a house and food for my kids."

"My kids would have been in school and then in the after school program. I'm a single mom who works full time and I do not know what I'm going to do with my kids in the fall. This is a major stressor."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Balancing work and caregiving requires flexibility in either the workplace, family life or from the caregiver, and the results of this parent survey illuminate this reality. During normal times, working parents have the daily task of juggling these pieces together, and flexibility in any of these areas makes a tremendous impact in their success. With the COVID-19 pandemic, finding this balance and flexibility is more difficult and even more important. With the financial impact of parents losing their jobs or having their hours cut, the unexpected burden of having to find new child care due to virtual learning or unavailability of their child care program, having to simultaneously supervise their child's learning while working and worrying about their decreased work productivity, and the fear and stress around their child and other family members being exposed to the virus, the normal child care struggle parents face is now exacerbated. These challenges are not distributed evenly throughout California's parents; those with lower incomes, those working outside the home, and those in Spanish-speaking communities appear to bear the burden of this. Money not only opens the door to more child care options, but with the opportunity to hire nannies and tutors, also decreases the risk of infection and ensures the child is receiving the maximum benefit from online education (or avoids it altogether). Families are struggling, and their children are in turn also struggling; increased support during this crisis is necessary, to mitigate the long-term financial and education consequences this pandemic will have on families and children. The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the results from this survey.

Maintain a Robust Mixed Delivery System

The results from this survey highlight the importance of a mixed delivery child care system. While this has always been important, the unique struggles families are facing during this pandemic emphasize this even more. There is no one child care setting that meets the needs of all families in California, just as there is no one standard family. The results and insights from this survey show that while there are some consistent patterns (i.e. valuing cleanliness/sanitation), there are also distinct groups of parents with varying priorities. There are parents that expressed fear of the virus and infection as their main concern, and are not comfortable with their children in any group setting and prefer a family member or friend watch their child; there are parents whose main concern is their school-aged child's education, and want a person or program who can dedicate time to helping them with distance learning; there are parents who are worried about their child's socialization and prefer a group setting; there are parents who prefer centers because they view them as more regulated; there are parents who prefer a family child care home because of the smaller group size and individual attention, and home-like environment. In thinking of ways to support families during this time, all of these concerns and preferences suggest that the system has to include diverse options, so that certain groups aren't being prioritized over others.

Recommendations to maintain mixed delivery options:

CENTER-BASED CARE

Based on parents' descriptions that preferred a child care center versus a family child care home, many perceived centers as more regulated and professional, and therefore cleaner and more sanitized. Licensed centers and family child care homes may require different supports to remain open and safe. Reduced child capacity has made it nearly impossible to remain financially feasible for most centers, with overhead (rent, staffing) and increased sanitation (barriers, additional toys and equipment, cleaning supplies).

Recommendations to maintain and efficiently use center based group settings:

- Providing public or private in-kind and financial assistance (free space usage, cover the cost of reconfiguring their space, cleaning service, supplemental grants to pay for staffing costs, etc.) will help to maintain this valuable supply for parents.
- School-aged care should be done in partnership with schools, possibly using school space and keeping the number of participants low to enable safe distancing. When children are attending different schools and using different online technology devices at off-campus settings, it is difficult for a supervising adult to support youth and children. Technology support to the provider or coordination of children at the same school with one provider may make this more supportive of children and manageable for providers.
- Research additional options to consider temporarily adjusting classroom capacity based on space configuration or mixed age groups with a maximum number of families, instead of the more familiar adult-to-child ratio.

FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME AND INFORMAL SUPPORT

In many ways, family child care homes uniquely meet the needs of parents, especially during the

pandemic: they're able to have smaller group size, they're more affordable, and they tend to be more flexible with hours and scheduling.¹ Family child care providers are required to follow state licensing regulations, and along with centers, have received state assistance to obtain cleaning and sanitizing supplies and personal protection equipment during the pandemic.

Recommendations to increase visibility of licensed family child care as an option for parents:

- A program that provided coaching to family child care providers, and a list of procedures and precautions to be taken during this time that would allow the providers to receive an unofficial badge or certification that would convey to parents that they're doing everything they can to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection and spread could help both the provider's business and parents' peace of mind. Companies such as Airbnb have adopted similar practices so that customers feel safer staying in someone else's home; a similar approach could help parents feel more comfortable using a home-based setting during the pandemic, and potentially in years to come.
- The state should apply for a federal Waiver for Extraordinary Circumstances² for relief from specific CCDF requirements for health and safety training for home-based providers, especially while in-person trainings are limited and necessary to accommodate the diverse language speakers.
- Making an allowance for subsidy payments for license-exempt caregiving to be allowed in the parents' home (and not be bound by the minimum wage rule) to help keep people together in one pod. Some parents mentioned wanting to use a friend or family member for child care, but they were worried about exposing someone that that person lived with who is high risk. For families using child care subsidies, they don't have to option of that caregiver watching their child in their own home. If this rule is suspended, at least temporarily, it allows families the option of having this informal caregiver live in and watch their child(ren) in their home, thereby creating a safer bubble.

- Support that enables a home-based provider to assist children with distance learning such as high speed connectivity, a special technical help line to troubleshoot computer issues for school-aged children, and virtual and/or recorded play groups.

Support for Parents

Through the open-ended responses, it's clear that this is an extremely stressful time for parents. Whether they're working outside the home and their young child's child care program has closed or has restricted hours due to COVID-19, they do not have a familial social network to help them, or their school-aged child with an IEP needs consistent help during the day doing distance learning but there's no one available to do this, many parents expressed frustration from feeling at a loss and not knowing what they were going to do. While higher income families are able to hire a babysitter, nanny, or tutor, lower and middle income families are often left with few options, especially if they're a single parent or don't have family in the area (or that family is considered high risk). Many parents have had their hours or salaries cut at work, and now have the unexpected cost of child care added on top of it. There's considerable discussion around supporting the economy during this time, but even if jobs become available, if there's no support around accessing or affording child care, parents will have to leave the workforce or delay re-entering it, as evident in some of the parent insights. Parents shouldn't be forced into making the impossible choice of caring for their children or working, especially as lack of income will have many more long-term consequences for children well beyond this pandemic. This is another phenomenon that is not new, but has become more salient now, and disproportionately affects women.

Recommendations to support parents:

- Advocate for federal and state funds to support subsidized child care for families. Encourage local and state incentives for employers to offer or subsidize child care for their employees (at all levels of their business).
- Encourage workplace flexibility and enable parents to successfully juggle between their caregiving duties and work responsibilities.
- The state's subsidized child care system should examine and consider if their standard eligibility rules need to be adjusted in the current and immediate post-pandemic period as our economy rebuilds. Some subsidized programs require that you meet their defined need at the time of eligibility or recertification of one's eligibility in the program. While subsidy eligibility is stable for 12 months after initial certification, including if a parent is seeking a job, working, in a job training program or going to school, there may be many disruptions to that pattern that the state agencies should anticipate and be open to potential adjustments to the norm. This can include eliminating the family fee requirement, lengthening 12-month eligibility, extending hours eligible for reimbursement, and adding more flexible funding in high-growth geographic areas with density of low-wage workers.
- Redeploy any staff who are in contact with families (such as home visitors, Alternative Payment, or child care resource and referral staff, etc) to check in with parents and see how they're coping, and offer any resources or support available, such as local food banks, WIC, and other local resources. Using this whole family model recognizes that the additional stress experienced by parents during this time also directly affects the child, and tries to support the family in a holistic way.
- Where non-English-speaking parents or family members are finding themselves as a caregiver and supporting their child's online participation in school, ensuring there is support for the non-English speaker so they can help their child as needed.

Widening Inequality

This pandemic is not egalitarian in its impact; this is evident in not only the infection and death rates³ but in the financial toll, particularly on families. The discrepancy between those who have lost their job or been furloughed by the language the survey was filled out in (15% for English, 43% for Spanish) is stark, as well as the number of parents who are working from home versus outside of the home by household income (page). The effects of this inequality are passed on to children, particularly school-aged children. Higher income parents mentioned holding their child back from kindergarten for another year of private preschool, meaning once they enter kindergarten their child will be one year ahead of the others, or transferring to a private kindergarten program so they don't have to do distance learning through the public school. Others mentioned hiring nannies, babysitters, or tutors to help their child with distance learning during the day, or sharing a tutor with a group of other children. This level of support and security was not seen in lower and middle income families, who mentioned staggering shifts between parents so the children aren't left at home alone, having to work from home full time and also try to also help their child with distance learning (which is much harder with younger children or those with special needs), trying to juggle care between various family members and friends, or still not knowing how they were going to fit all the pieces together. In a state and system that already has gross inequality in children's opportunities, this pandemic will only widen this gap.

Recommendations to slow the widening inequality:

- Child care funds must be targeted and enhanced in low-income communities to shore up the child care supply and make it a safe opportunity for families to use. Consider

supplemental funds, since market rate subsidy reimbursements penalize those in low-income counties/communities because their maximum reimbursement is dependent on the market price, which is lower in lower income communities. Include the corresponding need to build sustainable child care support options, ideally that lead to child care providers' wealth accumulation and asset building and/or a professional career for some individuals.

- Correspondingly, low-income families should have priority in accessing child care subsidies that support them in their parenting responsibilities.
- Support parents to create a learning pod for their children using voucher subsidies. Continue to allow parents to hire a TrustLine caregiver while following the Emergency Capacity Waiver under Department of Social Services and explore available public funding targeted to Local Education Agencies, such as Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) supplemental or Federal Title I, to partner with FCCs to support and enhance learning of school-aged children. This could include hiring a tutor to support distance learning, and increasing the reimbursement of school-aged children so a provider doesn't experience a decrease in income due to lower reimbursement rates for a pod of school-aged children only.
- Support a range of resources and opportunities to support children and families, in addition to child care funds directed to communities most impacted by Covid-19 as soon as possible. This can include personal protective equipment, job opportunities, health and mental health services, educational and nutrition supports within schools, free distance learning support, and transportation, so community environments feel safe and secure.

1 California Child Care Resource & Referral Network. (2020). *2019 California Child Care Portfolio*.

2 CCDF Frequently Asked Questions in Response to COVID-19. (2020, March 13). Retrieved September 16, 2020, from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-faqs-in-response-to-covid-19>

3 COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity. (2020, August 18). Retrieved September 16, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>