CONNECTICUT Early Childhood

UCONN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey Report

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2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey Report

Background

One of the guiding principles of Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is partnering with families to ensure their voices shape programs and policies that impact Connecticut (CT) families. As such, OEC has solicited feedback from CT's parents and caregivers[1] several times through statewide surveys.

One survey in 2020 was designed to assess urgent disruptions to child care access, impact on employment, and immediate family needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey captured families' real-time experiences navigating child care challenges during this period. Building on this initial effort, the OEC conducted a survey in 2022 to examine shifts in parents' needs, priorities, and work patterns as conditions evolved. The 2022 survey also gathered more detailed information on families' child care needs and the challenges they face in finding and affording care. Findings from these prior surveys have contributed to policy and programmatic adjustments aimed at improving access, equity, and quality within CT's early childhood system (e.g., the 2023 Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care Report; Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2023a, 2023b).

Building upon the work done in prior surveys, OEC, in partnership with researchers at the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work (UConn), developed the 2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey to capture the experiences, needs, and priorities of CT families with at least one child under the age of six. Specifically, the survey examined aspects of child care that parents prioritize when making decisions about child care, the barriers they face, what they need to access preferred child care, and what factors make a particular program the correct "fit." The survey also aimed to help OEC better

[1] For brevity, we will use the term 'parents' throughout the report.

understand the unique needs of specific populations of interest, such as racially and ethnically minoritized parents and single parent families.

Insights from the 2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey will guide programmatic and policy decisions that reduce barriers and promote equitable access to quality care. By centering families' perspectives, the OEC can build a more responsive, family-driven early childhood system that aligns services with the diverse needs of CT families and strengthens outcomes for children statewide.

Methods

1. Survey Development

The UConn team, OEC staff, and parent stakeholders collaborated on the content and structure of the survey. From September 2024 to July 2025, UConn, OEC staff, and relevant agency partners met 17 times to discuss and refine survey topics and questions. In addition to agency partners, the UConn team sought input from parent stakeholders by forming the Parent/Caregiver Survey Parent Committee (PCSPC). The committee comprised nine parents from OEC's Parent Cabinet, Parents Connecting Parents Parent Ambassadors, and CT's Two-Generational (2Gen) Initiative. UConn convened the PCSPC 12 times between January 2025 and April 2026, including four meetings focused on survey development (see Table A1 in Appendix A for all meeting topics).

To ensure the survey was accessible to CT parents, the UConn team wrote items in plain language and at no higher than a sixth-grade reading level, per an online readability checker,[2] as more than half of adults in the United States read at or below a middle school reading level (National Literacy Institute, 2025). Relatedly, to make the survey more linguistically inclusive and accessible to CT parents with at least one child under the age of six, the UConn team estimated the number of households with children under age six by language spoken at home using the 2019-2023 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample, provided by the U.S. Census Bureau

[2] *Readability Checker – Flesch Kincaid.* https://charactercalculator.com/readability-checker/

(2021, 2025). These estimates showed that English-only speaking households represented 65% of households with children under age six in CT, followed by Spanish (17%), Portuguese (2%), and Polish (1%). All other languages individually represented less than one percent. Based on these estimates, the survey and recruitment materials were available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish to support participation among households speaking the most common languages among CT parents with at least one child under the age of six.

The survey was hosted on the survey platform Qualtrics, enabling parents to complete the survey online or offline. The UConn team ensured that the survey format and accessibility functions (e.g., hover-over definitions) were available on touchscreen (e.g., cell phones, iPads) and non-touchscreen (e.g., computer) devices.

2. Recruitment

UConn used several data points to determine the minimum sample size needed to support the planned analyses, including comparisons of families' child care experiences across regions and sociodemographic groups (e.g., race and/or ethnicity). Specifically, UConn considered the estimated number of parents of young children in Connecticut (n = 234,540; State of Connecticut, 2025; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024) and the recommended minimum of 30 respondents per analytic subgroup for descriptive analyses and cross-tabulations (Hogg et al., 2013). Based on these factors, UConn estimated that a minimum sample of 1,440 parents was needed.

UConn implemented a comprehensive, multi-faceted outreach and recruitment approach to support participation in the 2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey. To develop and refine the recruitment plan, UConn worked closely with OEC staff and the PCSPC, meeting ten times between June and August 2025 (four meetings with the PCSPC and six with OEC staff and agency partners). The team developed both virtual and print recruitment materials, including survey flyers with embedded links and QR codes, as well as email and communication templates for partners to disseminate. To promote accessibility, all materials were written at a sixth-grade reading level.

UConn engaged a broad network of community partners in recruitment, including the PCSPC; CT's 2Gen Initiative; the OEC Parent Cabinet; OEC Parents Connecting Parents; Head Start; Even Start; Home Visitors; Sparkler; the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Local Governance Partners (LGPs); and child care providers across CT (see Table A2 in Appendix A for a complete list).

To maximize reach, UConn used both virtual and in-person recruitment methods. OEC, the UConn team, parent stakeholders, and other partners distributed the survey via email through its networks, and partners shared flyers at more than 150 locations statewide, including hair salons, libraries, restaurants, and schools. OEC also promoted the survey through social media posts and targeted social media ads. UConn also conducted in-person recruitment at more than 20 family-centered events across CT, including community fairs, back-to-school events, farmers' markets, and library programs. Parents could complete the survey on-site using iPads or by scanning QR codes. In the final month of recruitment, UConn partnered with child care providers to offer tailored 24-hour survey links and incentives to the families they serve.

To encourage participation, UConn offered several incentives. Parents who completed the survey in-person or through survey partners (e.g., child care providers, home visitors) received a $30 gift card. All other survey respondents were entered into a drawing for one of 50 $100 gift cards. UConn also provided $20 gift cards to partners—including home visitors, Sparkler Community Engagement Specialists, Family Bridge nurses, Community Health Specialists, and child care providers—who shared the survey with families.

3. Data Cleaning and Preparation

To support incentive distribution and monitor responses by recruitment source, UConn created seven identical Qualtrics surveys, each aligned with a specific recruitment strategy (e.g., in-person survey participation). The team also embedded automated safeguards in Qualtrics to limit bot and fraudulent responses, including detection of duplicate IP addresses and CAPTCHA scoring to flag potential bots.

The survey was open from September 1, 2025 to November 23, 2025. UConn downloaded the data weekly, merged files into a single dataset, and retained recruitment source as a variable. The team used Excel to filter, screen, and clean the data, conducting multiple rounds of systematic data cleaning to ensure quality.

Weekly Data Screening

Following each weekly download of the data, the UConn team assigned unique identifiers to new participants. UConn excluded participants if they met any of the following criteria:

- Flagged by Qualtrics as likely bots.
- Flagged as duplicates due to repeated IP addresses. In these cases, UConn retained only the first response.
- Failed to meet one or more eligibility criteria (i.e., providing informed consent, being a parent or caregiver of a child under the age of six, and residing in CT).
- Responded to questions visible only to bots.

UConn shared weekly summaries of the survey sample size and key parent demographics with OEC throughout data collection. See Appendix C1 for an example of the weekly summaries.

Post-Collection Cleaning

After data collection was complete, the UConn team conducted a comprehensive manual review of all responses that passed the weekly data screening checks to remove low-quality or invalid responses. Responses were excluded if they were incomplete with excessive missing data or did not have data for priority variables, and if the survey was completed under six minutes, which was the median survey completion time.

Responses were also excluded if they met two or more of the following criteria:

- Nonsensical or irrelevant free-text responses, including responses to open-ended questions and entries in "Other" fields.

- Consistent patterns of uniform response options within sections of the survey (e.g., answered response option "b" for every question in the "Barriers to Child Care" section).
- Contradictory response options to related questions (e.g., reported their child received care in their home, but also reported they traveled more than 25 minutes to child care).

In total, 2,104 participants were excluded during post-collection cleaning, resulting in a final sample size of 3,719 parents. The final sample size exceeds the minimum threshold to examine meaningful differences established prior to data collection (i.e., 1,440) by 2,279 parents.

4. Identification of Priority Research Questions

To identify priority research questions for the initial report, the UConn team met with the PCSPC to get their feedback on which survey questions were the most important to highlight and then worked with OEC staff to finalize them. The priority research questions that guided analyses were:

1. Does child care meet parents' needs?
    a. If their needs are not met by their current child care, what additional care would they use if they could access it?
2. What hours and days do parents use child care?
3. How long does it take for parents to travel to child care?
    a. What is the preferred travel time to get to care?
4. What are the five most common barriers to child care parents report?

5. Dissemination

The UConn team's approach to dissemination prioritized accessibility to key stakeholders including the OEC, child care providers, CT families, policymakers, the wider early childhood community, and all recruitment partners. UConn, in collaboration with the parent stakeholders on the PCSPC and the OEC team, developed three main products to disseminate survey findings externally: reports and an interactive dashboard for Local Governance Partners, a PowerPoint presentation highlighting key findings, and an animated video of findings titled, "A Day in Connecticut Child Care."

Local Governance Partner (LGP) Reports and Interactive Dashboard

There are 48 Local Governance Partners (LGPs) in Connecticut that serve as community-based early childhood hubs, bringing together families, providers, and organizations to coordinate services for young children. UConn created a report for each of the 48 LGPs that provides a demographic overview of the parents sampled in that LGP, as well as LGP-specific findings related to OEC's priority research questions (see Appendix C2 for the LGP report template using statewide data). Reports were intended to provide each LGP with community-level insights and to serve as a data source for their local needs assessments. UConn began developing the reports in January, following OEC's approval of UConn's report outline. The UConn team incorporated feedback from both OEC and the PCSPC in February and March.

To complement LGP-level reports, the UConn team also created an interactive dashboard in Tableau where LGPs could look at town-level data for the same variables. Data were shown only for towns that had six or more participating parents. The UConn team incorporated feedback from OEC in May and finalized the interactive dashboard in June.

Presentation of Preliminary Parent/Caregiver Survey Findings for the Office of Early Childhood

The UConn team created a presentation of preliminary findings for internal distribution to OEC staff. The presentation highlighted parent demographics and findings related to OEC's priority research questions. The presentation underwent iterative refinement based on the OEC's Commissioner's feedback.

"A Day in Connecticut Child Care": An Animated Video

The animated video titled, "A Day in Connecticut Child Care," translates statewide survey findings into a relatable story about the reality of child care for CT families. The primary audience for the video is CT parents, and, secondarily, those connected to young children (e.g., early childhood education professionals), and policymakers. The purpose of the animated video is to share survey findings, validate common child care challenges CT

parents experience, and demonstrate that the voices of CT families are heard and helping to shape decisions about child care across the state.

The UConn team began work on the video in early March by developing a creative brief and two script options for parent and OEC stakeholders to review. After receiving feedback on the video script, video production and animation began in April, led by the Innovations Institute media team. The video is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish, and includes closed captions.

Survey Findings

1. Participant Demographics

Analytic Sample

A total of 3,719 parents completed the survey. For several questions, parents had the option to select "prefer not to answer," and participation varied across survey items; as a result, not all parents answered every question. Accordingly, all percentages reported in this section are calculated among parents who responded to the specific question being analyzed, excluding parents who did not answer the question or selected "prefer not to answer." Across all variables included in this report, the number of parents who responded ranged from 1,119 to 3,719 parents.

Geographic Distribution

The parents in our sample were distributed across several LGPs throughout CT. The top five LGPs represented were Hartford LGP (6%, n = 204), Bridgeport LGP (5%, n = 198), West Hartford LGP (4%, n = 158), Northeast Early Childhood Council (NECC; 4%, n = 155), and Greater Danbury LGP (4%, n = 131). For an exhaustive list of all LGPs represented in the survey data, please see Table A3 in Appendix A. Regarding DCF regions (range: 411 – 857), almost one-quarter of parents lived in Region 3 (23%, n = 857) or Region 4 (22%, n = 802). An additional 15% (n = 570) of respondents lived in Region 1. See Figure B1 in Appendix B for a detailed breakout of parents by region. Relative to CT's overall regional distribution of parents with at least one child under six, our

sample overrepresented parents from Region 3 and underrepresented parents from Region 1. See Table A4 in Appendix A for a more detailed comparison of our sample and CT's overall regional distribution of parents with at least one child under six.

Key Parent Demographics

For detailed demographic information, see Table A5 in Appendix A. Parents were asked about their race and ethnicity, and could select all responses that applied. Most parents were White (45%, n = 1,588), Hispanic/Latino (30%, n = 1,048), and/or Black or African American (25%, n = 873). With respect to age, most parents were between the ages of 26 and 35 (57%, n = 2,035) or 36 and 45 (33%, n = 1,174). English was the most common primary language spoken in the home (83%, n = 2,990), followed by Spanish (12%, n = 425).

Parents also provided information on a child in their care under the age of six (their 'focal child'). In terms of their parenting roles, nearly all respondents indicated they were the biological, step-, adoptive, or foster parent of their focal child (98%, n = 3,483). About half (56%, n = 1,991) of focal children were 3-5 years old, 30% (n = 1,071) were 18-35 months old, and 14% (n = 496) were 0-17 months old.

With respect to household structure, 69% of parents (n = 2,516) reported that their household was a two-parent/caregiver household and 23% (n = 850) reported being the only parent or primary caregiver in the household. For more information on household structure, see Table A6 in Appendix A.

Parents reported on the number of people in their household. Overall, most parents (86%, n = 3,527) reported a household size between three and five members. Among parents who lived with their child (99%, n = 3,476), slightly more than one-third either lived in a three-person household (37%, n = 1,278) or a four-person household (34%, n = 1,186).

Finally, the survey sample included families across a broad range of household income levels. 77% of parents reported household incomes below the state median income (SMI), while 23% reported incomes at or above the SMI.

Relative to the overall state demographics, our sample disproportionally represented Hispanic or Latino parents, Black or African American parents, younger parents (ages 18 – 35), English-speaking parents, children ages three to five years old, parents with three or more children, and lower-income parents (e.g., earning less than 30% of the SMI). See Table A4 in Appendix A for a more detailed breakdown of the differences between parents in our sample compared to overall state demographics of parents with at least one child under six.

2. Child Care Descriptives

Within the child care descriptives and priority research question sections, the UConn team examined differences by type of primary child care, child's age, and LGP. LGPs with fewer than six parents were not included in the analysis to avoid overinterpreting findings.

Types of Care Used

Nearly one-in-four parents (23%) reported they or a partner care for their child themselves. Among those who use another type of care, the most common was child care centers (49%), followed by unpaid family or friends (18%) and kindergarten (11%). When considering age-related differences in child care type, child care centers were the most commonly used primary child care arrangement across all age groups (43%–53%) among parents who used other types of care besides themselves or their partner. In contrast, unpaid care from family or friends was more common among younger children, accounting for 20% of care for children aged 0–17 months and 30% for those aged 18–35 months, compared with 10% for children aged 3–5 years. Across LGPs, this pattern of primary child care use was generally consistent.

Hours and Days of Child Care Use

Among the 2,526 parents who responded to the question about the hours and days they use child care, 56% used full-time care, 24% used part-time care, and 14% used full day care. This pattern remained generally consistent when we analyzed usages by age of child, though among 0–17-month-olds and 18–35-month-olds, half day care was common (13%-16% among infants

and toddlers compared to 7% of preschool age children). For 3–5-year-olds, summer care was a common choice (11%). No notable differences in the hours and days parents use child care were observed by the type of primary child care or LGP. See Table A7 in Appendix A for more information on hours and days parents currently use child care.

3. Priority Research Questions

Satisfaction with Primary Child Care

Parents were asked how satisfied they were with their current primary child care. Of the 3,358 parents who responded to this question, 88% were somewhat or very satisfied with their primary child care. However, differences in satisfaction emerged based on type of primary child care, child's age, and LGP.

The type of primary care with the highest proportion of unsatisfied parents was unpaid care from family or friends (47%); followed by paid family, friends, babysitter, and/or nannies (12%); and care provided for the child by the responding parent or their partner (10%).

Regarding child's age, 24% of parents with children aged 18–35 months reported being unsatisfied with care, compared with only 7% of parents with children aged 0–17 months, and 7% of parents with children aged 3–5 years.

Across LGPs, most parents reported being somewhat or very satisfied with their current primary child care (range: 61% - 100%). However, several LGPs had comparatively higher shares of unsatisfied parents. The LGPs that had the largest percentage of parents who were unsatisfied with their primary child care were the Thomaston/Plymouth LGP (39%), followed by Groton LGP (26%) and Windsor Locks LGP (25%).

Unmet and Additional Needs for Child Care

Parents were asked if their current child care covered all their needs. Out of the 3,300 parents who answered this question, 35% (n = 1,144) reported their current care did not meet all their needs. Unmet needs varied by type of primary child care and child's age. For type of primary child care, unmet

needs were highest among parents using care provided by unpaid family and friends (72%); parents using paid family, friends, babysitter, and/or nannies (52%); and kindergarten (48%). Regarding child's age, nearly half (49%) of parents with children aged 18-35 months reported unmet needs, followed by 32% of parents with children aged 0-17 months and 27% of parents with children aged 3-5 years.

There was also variation in the proportion of parents with unmet needs across LGPs (range: 11% - 68%), with the greatest proportion of parents residing in the Northeast Early Childhood Council (68%), Thomaston/Plymouth LGP (65%), and Alliance for Bloomfield's Children (47%).

Parents who reported having unmet needs were asked what additional child care they would need if they were able to access it. Among the 1,119 parents who responded to this question, the most common types of care parents needed were full-time care (31%), drop-in-care (22%), and part-time care (17%). See Table A7 in Appendix A for more information on parents' additional needs for child care. These top three additional child care needs varied by parents' type of primary child care. The need for full-time care was highest among parents who provided care themselves or relied on a partner (54%), followed by those using group child care homes (42%) and paid family, friends, babysitters, and/or nannies (38%). The need for drop-in-care was highest among parents relying on unpaid family and friends (26%), paid family, friends, babysitters and/or nannies (22%), and child care centers (22%). Finally, the need for part-time care was highest among parents relying on paid family, friends, babysitters and/or nannies (30%); parents who provided care themselves or relied on a partner (29%); and parents using group child care homes (25%).

Parents' additional needs for care also varied by child's age and LGP. For parents with children aged 0–17 months, the most common additional needs were full-time (44%), part-time (34%), half-day (18%), or evening care (18%). The most common additional needs for parents with children aged 18–35 months was full-time (29%), drop-in (33%), and half-day care (22%). Among parents of children aged 3–5 years, the most common additional needs were full-time (30%), school vacation or holiday (27%), and summer care (22%).

The additional need for full-time care ranged from 6% - 66% across LGPs, with the highest proportion of parents needing full-time care living in the Northeast Early Childhood Council (66%), Early Start Network: Greenwich and New Canaan (60%), and New Britain LGP (53%). The proportion of parents who reported needing drop-in-care ranged from 3% - 64% across LGPs, with the highest proportion of parents needing drop-in-care living in Alliance for Bloomfield's Children (64%), Andover LGP (62%), Hebron LGP (62%), and Lebanon LGP (62%). The proportion of parents who needed part-time care ranged from 4% - 57% across LGP, with the highest proportion of parents living in the Stratford LGP (57%), Windsor Locks LGP (50%), and Bristol LGP (38%).

Cost of and Travel Time to Child Care

64% of parents (n = 2,061) reported paying for child care. Among those paying for care, the most common monthly costs were $4–$433 (28%), $434–$866 (24%), $867–$1,299 (18%), $1,300-$1,732 (13%), $1,733-$2,165 (9%), $2,166-$2,598 (5%), $2,599-$3,031 (2%), and $3,032 or more (1%). Overall, how much parents pay for care was similar across primary child care types and child's age.

Across LGPs, the cost of care generally followed the same overall pattern described above. However, parents in several LGPs reported a disproportionately higher cost of care than the overall sample. Parents in the Early Start Network (Greenwich and New Canaan) (67%), New Haven LGP (53%), and Stamford LGP (49%) had the highest percentage of parents who reported paying $1,733 or more per month for child care.

Regarding travel time to care, two-thirds of parents (67%, n = 2,190) reported their child receives care outside the home. Among these parents, travel time to care varied, with the highest proportion of parents traveling 16 minutes or more (29%), 6–10 minutes (28%), and 11–15 minutes (26%).

Travel times of 16 minutes or more were most common among parents using group child care homes (45%) and paid care from family, friends, babysitters, and/or nannies (44%). Travel times also varied by child's age, with 34% of parents with children aged 0–17 months, 31% of those with

children aged 18–35 months, and 28% of those with children aged 3–5 years traveling 16 minutes or more to care.

The proportion of parents who traveled 16 minutes or more varied by LGP (0% - 60%), with the greatest percentage of parents living in the Stafford LGP (60%), Middletown LGP (53%), Thomaston/Plymouth LGP (50%), and Windsor Locks LGP (50%). There was also variability in the proportion of parents who traveled 15 minutes or less to care (40% - 100%), with the greatest percentage of parents living in the Naugatuck LGP (100%), Mansfield LGP (93%), and Northwest CT LGP (91%).

Ideal Cost of and Travel Time to Child Care

Parents were asked what they considered to be an affordable cost of child care. Of the 3,217 parents who answered this question, one-third of parents (33%) reported paying more for child care than they considered affordable. More than half of parents (55%) identified $4–$433 per month as an ideal cost of care, and an additional 23% indicated an ideal cost of care was between $434-$867 per month.

Additionally, parents were asked what they considered to be an ideal time to travel to child care. Out of the 3,204 parents who answered this question, most (84%) reported 15 minutes or less as an ideal travel time to care.

Both ideal cost of and travel time to care were generally consistent across types of primary child care, child's age, and LGP. An exception was observed among parents relying on unpaid care from family or friends, among whom 41% reported more than 25 minutes as an ideal travel time to care.

Looking for Child Care

Parents were asked if they were currently looking for child care and/or on a waitlist and could select all applicable response options. Out of the 3,356 parents who answered this question, nearly one-in-three parents (30%, n = 1,006) were actively searching for child care and/or on a waitlist. The proportion of parents searching for care and/or on a waitlist varied by type of primary child care. The type of primary child care with the highest proportion

of parents who were searching for care and/or on a waitlist was unpaid care from family or friends (32%), parents caring for their child themselves or relying on their partner (21%), and child care centers (17%).

Parents' searching for care and/or waitlist status also varied by child's age. Nearly half (48%) of parents of children aged 18-35 months were searching for care and/or on a waitlist. 39% of parents of children aged 0-17 months and 18% of parents of children aged 3-5 years reported actively searching for care and/or being on a waitlist.

There was variability in the percentage of parents searching for child care and/or on a waitlist by LGP (11% -71%), with the greatest proportion of parents searching for care and/or on a waitlist in Northeast Early Childhood Council (71%), Early Start Network: Greenwich and New Canaan (66%), and Ashford LGP (53%).

Factors Affecting Parents' Decisions About Child Care

Parents were asked what they consider when making decisions about child care when it comes to their child's learning, feelings of connection, hours and distance to care, and other logistical factors. Parents could select all factors that applied. Among the 2,911 parents who responded to at least one of these questions, 85% identified both their child's sense of safety with providers or teachers and opportunities for their child to learn social and emotional skills as key considerations in their decision-making. Other commonly reported factors included the cleanliness of the child care setting (79%), affordability (78%), and proximity of the child care to their home (77%).

While factors influencing parents' decisions about child care were generally consistent among parents regardless of their child's age, some age-specific differences were observed. Parents of children aged 18–35 months placed particular emphasis on learning through play (77%) and the child care being a welcoming environment (79%). In comparison, parents of children aged 3–5 years prioritized child care settings that provide space for outdoor play and opportunities for physical activity (69%).

The top five factors parents consider when making decisions about child care were consistent across LGPs; however, the percentage of parents selecting individual factors varied across LGPs. The greatest variability was observed for affordability (25% - 97%), children's sense of safety with providers (35% - 100%), and the cleanliness of the child care setting (38% - 100%; see Table A8 in Appendix A). Because some LGPs had relatively small numbers of respondents, these percentages should be interpreted cautiously.

Parents who selected more than five factors were also asked to identify the five factors they considered the most important when making decisions about care. The most common factors were their child's sense of safety with their providers or teachers (60%), opportunities for their child to develop social and emotional skills (53%), feeling comfortable leaving their child in care (41%), opportunities for children to learn through play (35%), and the presence of providers or teachers trained in early childhood care and education (30%).

Barriers to Child Care

Parents were asked to report barriers encountered when attempting to access or use child care, including issues related to availability, hours of operation, enrollment processes, transportation and access, cost, and challenges in supporting children's physical and emotional health. Overall, 66% of respondents (n = 1,993) reported experiencing at least one barrier to using child care. Among the parents who answered these questions, the most common barriers were the cost of child care (53%), long waitlists (40%), lack of available openings (37%), long travel distances to child care (29%), and inability to obtain financial assistance such as Care 4 Kids or sliding-scale fees (29%).

The proportion of parents who selected the overall top five barriers varied across type of primary child care: cost of care (range: 37% – 63%); long waitlists (range: 24% - 49%); lack of available openings (range: 18% - 44%); long distance to care (range: 13% - 60%); inability to obtain financial assistance (range: 18% - 61%).

Barriers among parents of children ages 0–17 months and 18-35 months were similar to the overall barriers reported, with some variations reported by parents of children ages 3-5 years. Although these parents had the same top three overall barriers, 26% of parents with children ages 3-5 years also reported barriers related to how care was not open late enough and 23% reported care was not open early enough.

Barriers to child care also varied by LGP. Among parents who cited cost as a barrier (range: 27% - 83%), the highest proportions resided in Windham LGP (83%), Milford LGP (78%), and Windsor LGP (76%). Long waitlists (range: 6% - 71%) were most prominent in the West Hartford LGP (71%), Branford LGP (63%), and Groton LGP (52%). Lack of available openings (range: 8% - 100%) was most frequently reported in the Winchester LGP (100%), West Hartford LGP (66%) and Windham LGP (58%).

The proportion of parents who selected long travel distances as a barrier also varied by LGP (range: 6% - 67%), with the highest percentages observed in Wolcott LGP (67%), Alliance for Bloomfield's Children (56%), and Northeast Early Childhood Council (51%). Similarly, the inability to obtain financial assistance (range: 10% - 67%) was most frequently reported in Plainville LGP (67%), Ashford LGP (60%), and Naugatuck LGP (60%).

Discussion and Implications

The 2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey captures the nuanced reality of child care in CT, emphasizing both areas of strength and challenges. Several key themes emerged from the data.

First, while the majority of parents reported satisfaction with their current type of primary child care, more than one-third of parents had unmet child care needs, meaning they were not using their preferred or needed form(s) of child care. Reports of dissatisfaction with care and unmet needs were especially prevalent among families using informal child care arrangements such as paid or unpaid family, friend, babysitter, or nanny care. Although

informal care is the preferred choice for some families, others may rely on these arrangements because they are unable to access their preferred type of care. Age-related trends also emerged; parents of toddlers reported higher levels of unmet child care needs compared to parents of infants and preschool age children. Promoting awareness of child care resources and referral services, expanding financial assistance for families, and investing in the child care workforce to grow child care capacity could help parents access the care they need and prefer.

Second, cost was the most frequently reported barrier to accessing child care, and the inability to obtain financial assistance was the fifth most common barrier. Consistent with these findings, one-third of parents reported paying more for child care than they considered affordable. Together, these findings underscore the salience of child care cost for families in CT, and highlight the importance of initiatives, such as the Early Childhood Education Endowment (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2026), that help reduce the cost of care. Expanding financial assistance programs and simplifying subsidy processes may improve families' access to child care.

Third, parents in CT's northeastern region — specifically the Ashford LGP and Northeast Early Childhood Council — reported greater challenges accessing child care across multiple indicators than parents in other regions. Compared with parents in other LGPs, a greater proportion reported searching for and/or being on waitlists for care. They also more frequently reported long distances to care and difficulty obtaining financial assistance as barriers to care. Together, these findings suggest that families in the Ashford LGP and Northeast Early Childhood Council face multiple, overlapping challenges in accessing child care. Prioritizing these regions for support, including targeted resource allocation, logistical assistance, and strategies to improve the availability and affordability of child care, may help address these disparities.

Finally, the factors parents prioritize when making decisions about child care — primarily their child's sense of safety, opportunities for social-emotional development, and their own comfort leaving their child in the care setting — reflect a consistent emphasis on relational and developmental

considerations. These findings highlight the importance parents place on the quality of the child care environment when selecting care and suggest that quality improvement initiatives should continue to prioritize these aspects of care. At the same time, quality-related factors were not among the most frequently reported barriers to accessing child care. Instead, parents more often reported logistical barriers, such as cost, availability, and accessibility. Together, these findings highlight an important distinction between what parents value in child care and what determines whether they can access it: families may prioritize high-quality care when making decisions, while practical constraints limit the options available to them. At the local level, LGPs can use these findings to inform their community action plans and develop tailored strategies that address the specific child care needs and gaps identified within their communities.

1. Survey Limitations

While significant efforts were made to capture the diverse experiences of families in Connecticut with young children, several limitations should be noted when interpreting the findings in this report. Despite a multi-faceted recruitment strategy, certain populations may be underrepresented, such as families in rural areas where community infrastructure and partner networks are less dense. Further, although recruitment materials and the survey were available in the four most common languages spoken by CT families with children under six (i.e., English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish), in-person recruitment efforts were conducted primarily by English-speaking researchers, which may have limited the team's engagement with non-English-speaking families during those events. Additionally, the survey's length may have introduced response burden, potentially discouraging participation among families with limited time.

2. Opportunities for Future Research

The findings from the 2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey point to several important directions for future research. First, although the survey was distributed through multiple community-based and online channels, future data collection efforts should continue to prioritize outreach to populations

that are often underrepresented in survey research, including families in rural regions, those experiencing homelessness or housing instability, non-English-speaking families, and families who are not connected to licensed child care or other community services. Partnering with bilingual community researchers and expanding culturally responsive, in-person recruitment strategies may further strengthen participation among non-English-speaking families and other underrepresented groups. Finally, longitudinal research tracking changes in families' child care needs, barriers, and access over time would help the OEC assess whether programmatic and policy changes are achieving their intended impact.

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Appendix A

Tables

Table A1

Parent Caregiver Survey Parent Committee (PCSPC) Meeting Topics and Attendance

Meeting Date	Meeting Topics	Attendance
1/25/2025	Survey overview and priority survey topics	8
2/25/2025	Recruitment strategies	9
4/14/2025	Survey content and wording	6
5/12/2025	Recruitment strategies	6
7/21/2025	Review survey draft	7
8/18/2025	Recruitment materials and strategies	5
9/8/2025	Recruitment materials and strategies	7
10/20/2025	Survey and recruitment updates	5
11/10/2025	Flyer distribution and discuss priority topics for LGP reports	4
2/9/2026	LGP report template and dissemination of survey findings	5
3/9/2026	LGP report template and dissemination of survey findings	3
4/13/2026	Review products OEC will disseminate and PCSPC recruitment effort data	4

Note. Parents were compensated with a $30 gift card per meeting.

Table A2

Survey Recruitment Partners (N=140)

Recruitment Partner
All Our Kin
Alliance for Community Empowerment
Child Care Centers (N = 50)
Child Care for Connecticut
Child First
City of Hartford School Readiness Program
Community Health Workers
CT's 2Gen Initiative
CT Association of Community Health Centers
CT Association of School Superintendents
CT Baby Bonds
CT Birth to Three
CT Department of Social Services-SNAP Program
CT Department of Children and Families
CT Head Start Association
CT Paid Leave Authority
CT Project/RAPID
Dental Health Partnership
Early Care Connection
Early Start CT
Even Start- Middletown
Even Start- New London
Even Start- Torrington
Family Bridge Nurses
Home Visiting Providers
Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Inc.
Local Governance Partners (N = 48)
New Britain Early Start

OEC's Parent Cabinet
OEC's Parents Connecting Parents
OEC's Universal Nurse Home Visiting
Read to Grow
Sparkler App
Sparkler Community Engagement Specialists
Staffed Family Child Care Networks (N = 3)
Team Inc.
Thames Valley Community Action Agency (TVCCA)
UConn Nepalese Student Association
UConn Senior Director of Student Activities
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury
Wethersfield Early Childhood Collaborative
Women, Infants, and Children App

Table A3

Local Governance Partners (LGPs)

LGP	*N*	*%*
Hartford LGP	204	5.5%
Bridgeport LGP	198	5.3%
West Hartford LGP	158	4.2%
Northeast Early Childhood Council (NECC)	155	4.2%
Greater Danbury LGP	131	3.5%
New Haven LGP	127	3.4%
Stamford LGP	101	2.7%
Norwalk LGP	95	2.6%
New London LGP	92	2.5%
Valley Early Childhood Regional Council	84	2.3%
New Britain LGP	75	2.0%
Manchester LGP	68	1.8%
Southeast CT LGP	68	1.8%
Waterbury Bridge to Success Partnership	65	1.7%
East Hartford LGP	63	1.7%
Alliance for Bloomfield's Children	57	1.5%
Early Start Network: Greenwich and New Canaan	56	1.5%
Mansfield LGP	56	1.5%
Northwest CT LGP	52	1.4%
Bristol LGP	51	1.4%
Eastern CT LGP	51	1.4%
Hamden's Partnership for Young Children	51	1.4%
West Haven Early Childhood Council	45	1.2%
Andover/Hebron/Lebanon LGP	42	1.1%
Collaborative for Colchester's Children	42	1.1%
Wethersfield Early Childhood Collaborative	41	1.1%
Branford LGP	39	1.0%
Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington	38	1.0%
Ashford LGP	37	1.0%
Groton LGP	37	1.0%
Middletown LGP	31	0.8%

Windsor LGP	29	0.8%
Meriden LGP	27	0.7%
Coventry LGP	24	0.6%
Windham LGP	24	0.6%
East Haven LGP	23	0.6%
Stratford LGP	23	0.6%
Vernon LGP	22	0.6%
Windsor Locks LGP	21	0.6%
Thomaston/Plymouth LGP	20	0.5%
Milford LGP	18	0.5%
Newington LGP	15	0.4%
Stafford LGP	13	0.3%
Naugatuck LGP	12	0.3%
Enfield KITE (Key Initiatives to Early Education)	10	0.3%
Plainville LGP	10	0.3%
Wolcott LGP	9	0.2%
Winchester LGP	6	0.2%
Total	2,716	73.0%
LGP not available	*872*	
Town not available	*131*	

Table A4

Comparison of Parent/Caregiver Survey and Overall Connecticut Averages

	Parent/Caregiver Survey Parents		*CT Parents with Children Ages 0 to 5*	
DCF Regions*	N	%	N	%
Region 1	609	14%	45,693	23%
Region 2	445	10%	27,786	14%
Region 3	1217	28%	26,956	14%
Region 4	856	20%	36,702	19%
Region 5	567	13%	29,621	15%
Region 6	475	11%	30,425	15%
Total	*4,328*		*197,183*	
Race/Ethnicity**				
White	1,588	45%	162,866	60%
Hispanic or Latino	1,048	30%	57,475	21%
Black or African American	873	25%	27,882	10%
Asian	211	6%	18,376	7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	27	1%	2,350	1%
Middle Eastern or North African	22	1%	1,882	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	13	0.4%	483	0.2%
Other Race/Ethnicity	35	1%	24,541	9%
Total	*3,478*		*269,653*	
Parents' Age**				
Under 18	42	1%	*N/A*	
18-25	198	6%	9,721	4%
26-35	2,035	57%	116,343	43%
36-45	1,174	33%	128,355	48%
46-55	106	3%	13,587	5%
56+	38	1%	1,647	1%
Total	*3,593*		*269,653*	

Primary Language Spoken at Home**				
English	2,990	83%	187,249	69%
Spanish	425	12%	45,903	17%
Other primary language	187	5%	36,501	14%
Total	*3,602*		*269,653*	
Focal Child's Age**				
Zero to two years old	2,024	49%	157,223	58%
Three to five years old	2,142	51%	112,321	42%
Total	*4,166*		*269,653*	
Number of Children Ages 0 to 5**				
One child	2,318	63%	109,064	71%
Two children	976	26%	40,496	26%
Three children	258	7%	5,045	3%
Four children	101	3%	0	0%
Five or more children	54	1%	62	0.04%
Total	*3,707*		*154,664*	
Income Ranges**				
Below 30% SMI	1,162	28%	2,812	14%
~30% and less than 50% SMI	701	17%	2,424	14%
~50% and less than 60% SMI	573	14%	307	6%
~60% and less than 75% SMI	318	8%	1,247	9%
~75% and less than 100% SMI	383	9%	1,060	12%
~100% and less than 130% SMI	223	5%	384	9%
Above ~ 130% SMI	567	14%	600	35%
Total	*3,707*		*154,664*	

Note. Race and ethnicity categories were not mutually exclusive and may add up to more than 100%. A total of 243 survey respondents were multiracial (7%) and a total of 31,273 (12%) were multiracial in the Connecticut population. Other percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

*Data were from the 2020-2024 American Community Survey summary averages

**Data were from the 2024 American Community Survey data and represent households with at least one child ages 0 – 5, not individual parents

Table A5

Key Parent Demographics

	N	*%*
Race/Ethnicity (N = 3,478)		
White	1,588	45%
Hispanic or Latino	1,048	30%
Black or African American	873	25%
Asian	211	6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	27	0.8%
Middle Eastern or North African	22	0.6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	13	0.4%
Other Race/Ethnicity	35	1%
Prefer not to answer	*64*	
Race unknown	*113*	
Parents' Age (N = 3,593)		
Under 18	42	1%
18-25	198	6%
26-35	2,035	57%
36-45	1,174	33%
46-55	106	3%
56+	38	1%
Prefer not to answer	*13*	
Age unknown	*113*	
Primary Language Spoken at Home (N = 3,602)		
English	2,990	83%
Spanish	425	12%
Other primary language	187	5%
Prefer not to answer	*4*	
Primary language unknown	*113*	
Number of Children (N = 3,707)		
One child	2,318	63%
Two children	976	26%
Three children	258	7%

Four children	101	3%
Five or more children	54	1%
Prefer not to answer	*12*	
Focal Child's Age (N = 3,558)		
0 – 17 months	496	14%
18 – 35 months	1,071	30%
3 – 5 years	1,991	56%
Prefer not to answer	*11*	
Child age unknown	*150*	
Relationship to Focal Child (N = 3,545)		
Parents (biological, step, adoptive, or foster)	3,483	98%
Grandparents	39	1%
Other family member	20	0.6%
Legal guardian	3	0.1%
Prefer not to answer	*23*	
Relationship unknown	*151*	

Note. Percentages are calculated based on parents who provided a valid response (i.e., excluding "Prefer not to answer" and no response). Due to rounding, the total percentages may not add up to 100%. 7% of parents were multiracial.

Table A6

Household Structure (N = 3,719)

	N	*%*
Two parents or primary caregivers live in the home	2,516	68%
One parent or primary caregiver lives in the home	850	23%
Extended family members live in the home	258	7%
Other	41	1%
Prefer not to answer	*19*	
Household Structure unknown	*35*	

Note. Response options were not mutually exclusive and may add up to more than 100%.

Table A7

Hours and Days of Child Care: Current Use and Additional Needs

	Current Use		Additional Needs	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Full-time	1,408	56%	350	31%
Part-time	599	24%	185	17%
Full days	357	14%	97	9%
Half days	259	10%	167	15%
Hourly care	221	9%	175	16%
Evening care	77	3%	139	12%
Overnight care	40	2%	37	3%
School age care	126	5%	65	6%
Drop-in care	124	5%	244	22%
Weekend care	86	3%	149	13%
Summer care	194	8%	157	14%
School vacation/holiday care	113	4%	182	16%
Other	63	2%	51	5%
Total	2,526		1,119	

Note. Response options were not mutually exclusive and may add up to more than 100%.

Table A8

Percentage of Parents Who Consider Each Factor When Choosing Child Care

Factors Parents Consider	LGP Ranges
Child's Learning	*%*
My child plays outside	19% - 100%
My child learns through play	35% - 100%
My child learns social and emotional skills	50% - 100%
There are enough providers/teachers to engage my child	33% - 100%
Providers/teachers are trained in early childhood care	35% - 100%
Providers/teachers have experience caring for children	29% - 100%
Providers/teachers focus on my child's academic skills	23% - 83%
Providers/teachers help my child receive services (e.g., Birth to Three)	0% - 63%
Child's Feelings of Connection	
My child feels safe with their child care providers/teachers	35% - 100%
My child is with the same providers/teachers each day	38% - 89%
I feel comfortable leaving my child there	42% - 100%
I feel respected by providers/teachers	33% - 92%
Providers/teachers communicate with me about my child's day	27% - 100%
Providers/teachers communicate with me about my child's learning and growth	21% - 100%
Providers/teachers communicate to me what is being taught daily	21% - 79%
Providers/teachers share the same culture as my family	4% - 37%
Providers/teachers respect my family's culture	19% - 74%
Providers/teachers listen to me	15% -89%
Providers/teachers have worked at the child care for a while	4% - 78%
Hours and Distance	
The child care is close to where I live	38% - 100%
The child care is close to where I work	13% - 80%
The child care is close to where I go to school	0% - 35%

The child care is on the public school bus route	0% - 27%
I can use public transportation, such as a bus, to get to child care	0% - 31%
The hours work with my family's needs	23% - 82%
Other Logistics	
The child care fits my budget	25% - 97%
The child care offers meals	0% - 63%
The child care is clean	38% - 100%
The child care is welcoming	44% - 100%
The child care is licensed	29% - 100%
The child care has enough providers/teachers to care for all children	33% - 100%
The child care has a spot for my child	19% - 100%
I can use financial support at the child care, such as Care 4 Kids or sliding scale fees	8% - 70%
Someone I trust told me about the child care	0% - 61%

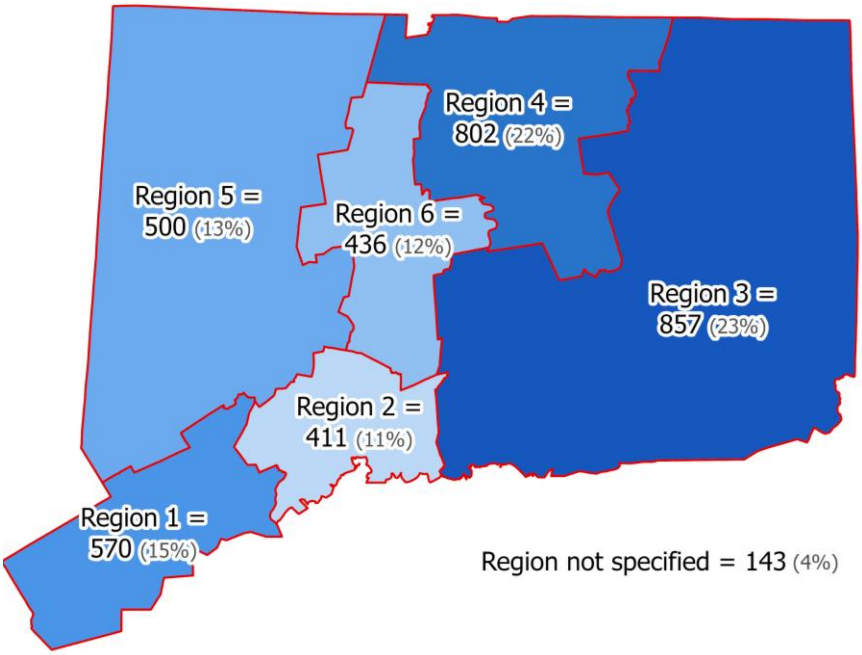
Note. Ranges represent the minimum and maximum percentage of parents selecting a given factor across LGPs.

Appendix B

Figures

Figure B1

Parent/Caregiver Survey Participation by Region



Appendix C

Documents

Appendix C1

Weekly Data Collection/Recruitment Summaries Example

2025 Parent/Caregiver Survey Updates

Week of 11/3/2025

We've distributed **2,306+ flyers**, and heard from **2,902 parents**, as of 11/5/25.

Recent Recruitment Efforts

- 10/29-11/23: **Identidad Latina ad is live**, reaching 32,000 viewers a month.
- 11/4: Providers shared the survey with families at 2 family child care homes in Waterbury and Manchester. 6 parents took the survey.
- 11/5: 1 member of our team attended the **Community Gathering: The Magic of a Read Aloud** in New London. 15 parents took the survey.
- 11/5: Providers shared the survey with families at 5 child care centers and family child care homes in Waterbury, Bridgeport, Torrington, Portland, and Moodus. 40 parents took the survey.
- 11/6: Providers shared the survey with families at 12 child care centers and family child care homes in Stamford, Waterbury, Hamden, Westbrook, Hartford, Wethersfield, and New London. 55 parents took the survey.
- 11/6/2025: 1 member of our team visited the **Bethany Lutheran Nursery School** in Cromwell. 22 parents took the survey.

Upcoming Recruitment Efforts

- 11/7: Personalized survey recruitment with 5 child care centers and family child care homes in Westbrook, West Hartford, Bridgeport, Fairfield, and Stratford.
- 11/10: Personalized survey recruitment day with Wee Learn & Play Child Care Center in Torrington.
- 11/21: Personalized survey recruitment day with Early Childhood Development Center in New London.

For more information on UConn's recruitment, see **this interactive map**, updated 10/30/25.

The values reported in this document do not account for final data cleaning procedures. Participants may be excluded from final counts for meeting data exclusion flags. Contents of this report are for internal UConn and OEC reference.

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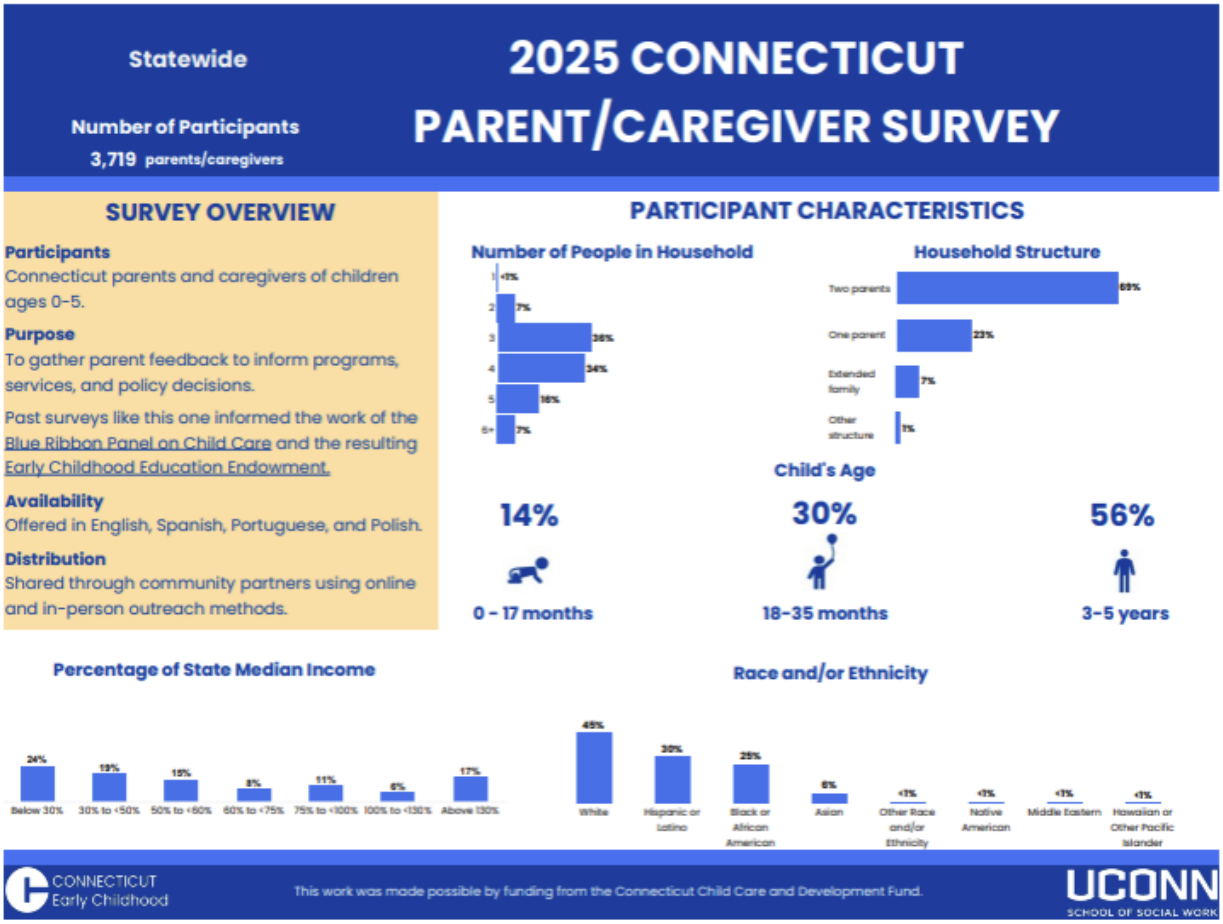
CONNECTICUT Early Childhood

Appendix C2

Statewide LGP Report



Statewide

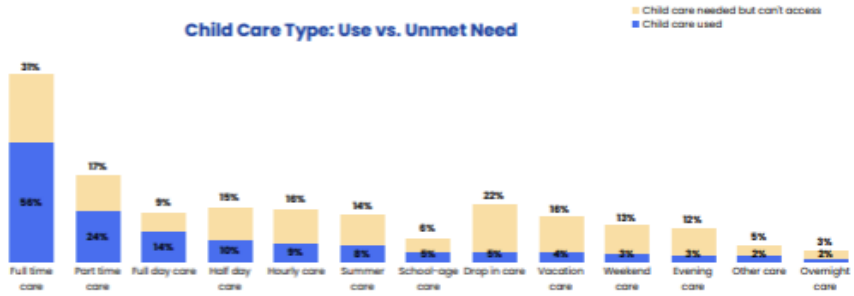
Number of Participants
3,719 parents/caregivers

2025 CONNECTICUT PARENT/CAREGIVER SURVEY

CHILD CARE USE AND NEEDS

35% of families' child care needs are NOT being met

Child Care Type: Use vs. Unmet Need

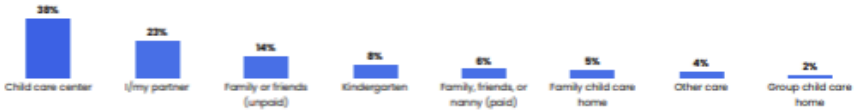


TRAVEL TIME TO CHILD CARE

20% of parents travel **16 MINUTES OR MORE** to child care

84% of parents **PREFER** to travel **15 MINUTES OR LESS** to child care

Forms of Child Care Used by Families



TOP BARRIERS

1. The cost of the child care was too expensive	53%
2. The child care had a long waitlist	40%
3. The child care did not have any open spots	37%
4. I wasn't able to get financial support, such as Care 4 Kids or sliding scale fees	29%
5. The child care was too far away from where I live	29%

CONNECTICUT Early Childhood

This work was made possible by funding from the Connecticut Child Care and Development Fund.

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