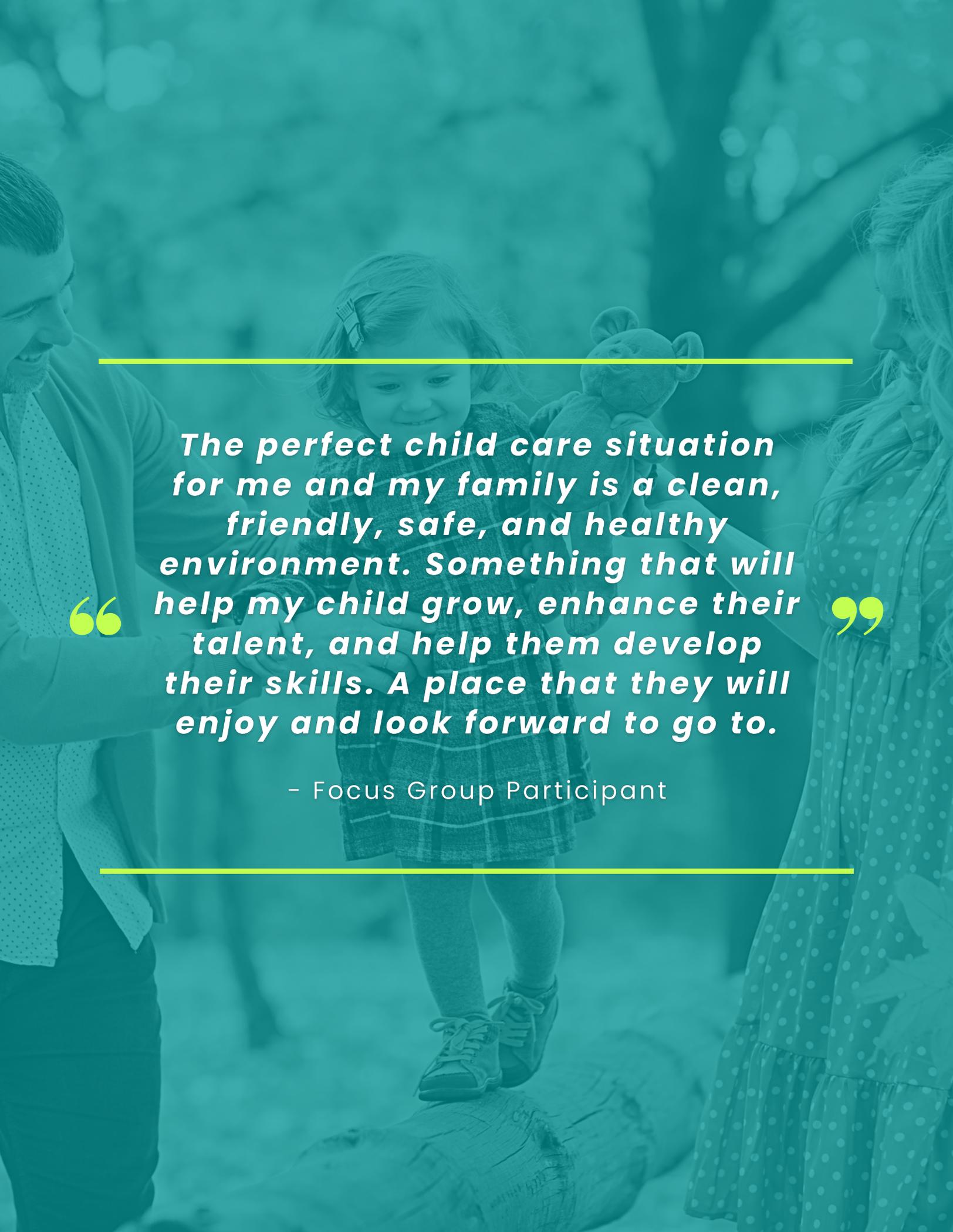




**CENTERING PARENT + FAMILY CHOICE:**  
A STATEWIDE LOOK AT ARIZONA'S CHILD CARE DECISIONS





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***The perfect child care situation for me and my family is a clean, friendly, safe, and healthy environment. Something that will help my child grow, enhance their talent, and help them develop their skills. A place that they will enjoy and look forward to go to.***

- Focus Group Participant

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# INTRODUCTION

Child care and early education gained national attention during the COVID-19 pandemic when parents and families faced unprecedented concerns and uncertainty in their choices about how best to get care for their children. Many experienced child care closures, while weighing new health and safety considerations for children and relatives and balancing pandemic-related workplace turbulence.

This universal shift prompted questions around how families were responding to meet their needs, what was driving their decision-making, and the permanency of any pandemic implications on parent choice.

Surveys supported by the U.S. Department of Education<sup>1</sup> and others have sought to understand child care arrangements, challenges, and determining factors for families on a national scale. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation published Arizona-specific information on similar data with an economic lens in the 2021 report, "Untapped Potential in AZ: How Child Care Impacts Arizona's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy."<sup>2</sup> **The report expressed that understanding family motivations when selecting child care providers is key for stakeholders to "better align their efforts toward effective solutions."**

Our statewide study examines these facets of the child care equation and incorporates parent and family preferences, by seeking to understand ideal child care arrangements Arizona families want for their children. This approach uplifts parent voice **and choice** toward designing and re-imagining supports that meet the evolving needs and priorities of families over time.

Specifically, the project aimed to learn:

- How COVID-19 impacted Arizona families and their child care arrangements;
- How Arizona families are meeting their current child care needs;
- What factors contribute to the choices Arizona families are making;
- "Perfect world" child care arrangements across age groups;
- The experience of Arizona's working families; and,
- How perceptions and decisions vary across geographic, cultural, and demographic groups.

“

***It was a struggle because day care was not an option since they could not operate during lockdown. My babysitter works at the hospital too, so I was kind of worried having my son be around her since she is more exposed to the virus at work. My family was also not an option because we were kind of isolating from being around with anyone.***

- Focus Group Participant

”

# STUDY DESIGN

Our research team connected with families through virtual focus groups facilitated in both English and Spanish to capture sentiment and themes Arizona families were experiencing related to COVID-19, work, and child care. This responsive discussion informed the development of the survey instrument, which was then reviewed by family, community, and State agency partners prior to distribution in the field.

The survey deployed statewide in November 2021, reaching 608 parents and guardians across Arizona with children ages 0-8 who were the primary decision makers for child care arrangements in their home. Responses were collected through March 2022 to ensure a regionally diverse survey population from Arizona's 15 counties.



# KEY FINDINGS

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON CARE

The study revealed a **bilateral shift in child care arrangements occurred during the pandemic**. Some families pulled away from formal child care to parents and trusted family members, while others moved children from informal Family, Friend or Neighbor Care to more formal settings to protect vulnerable caretakers. **Overall, 81 percent of respondents experienced a change in child care arrangements due to COVID-19.**

Since that time, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) have returned to pre-pandemic child care arrangements and are spending the same amount of time in care. Another 1 in 4 (22%) have returned to prior arrangements and are spending more time in care than before COVID-19. Some (8%) have returned to pre-pandemic arrangements but are spending less time there, some (9%) are uncertain about future arrangements, and some (9%) intend to choose different arrangements. **Altogether, 57 percent of Arizona families made lasting changes to their child care arrangements since COVID.**

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON WORK ARRANGEMENTS

A majority of Arizona households (67%) had a parent or guardian begin working from home during COVID-19. **Some (22%) made the shift home permanently.** Some (33%) did so temporarily and plan to fully return to the workspace, and **another 18 percent now work in a hybrid in-office/at-home scenario.** More than one quarter of households (28%) remained at the workplace. This number was higher for essential workers, non-college graduates, those in Western Arizona, and those making less than \$35,000.

Employment dynamics were directly impacted by pandemic implications on child care and, overall, **62 percent of families reported a parent or guardian in their household left a job or reduced work hours to care for children during the COVID pandemic.** 2 in 5 households (41%) had a parent or guardian temporarily reduce working hours or leave their job to care for children. Another **1 in 5 (18%) did so permanently, and some (7%) were unsure about their return.** No changes occurred in one-third (34%) of households, which was most common for individuals working in Government or Public Sector, Manufacturing, Mining and Tourism, and Hospitality industries and not correlated with family income level.



“

**When COVID-19 first hit, we stopped child care for a few months and relied on grandparents, but now we are back to normal.**

- Focus Group Participant

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“ **During the COVID pandemic, I was my child's provider. I did have to work, but most of my day was spent playing and learning with my daughter.** ”

-Focus Group Participant

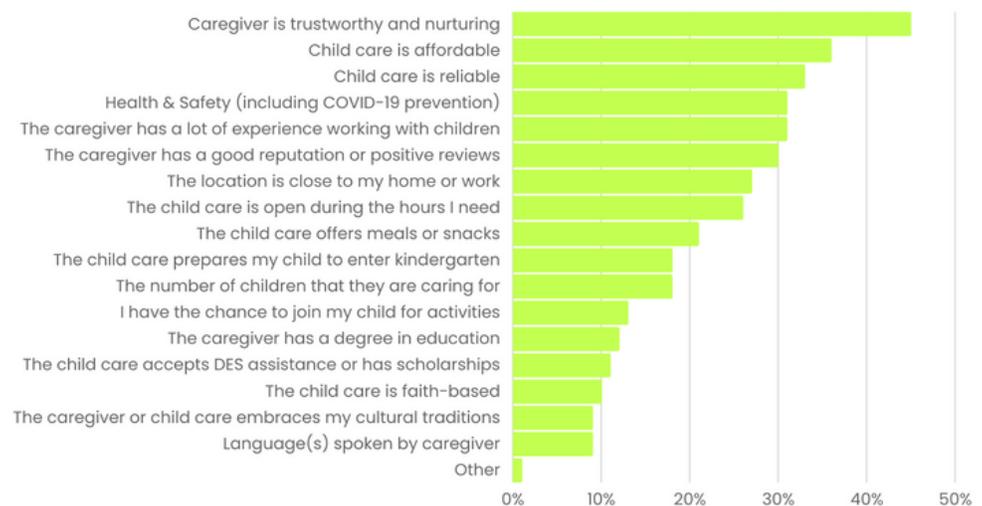
# KEY FINDINGS

## CHILD CARE DECISIONS

Survey respondents were asked to select up to five criteria that were most important to them when choosing care arrangements, and across the sample, **45 percent identified finding a “caregiver who is trustworthy and nurturing” as a top consideration. This answer was selected more frequently (by 9%) than any of the remaining choices.** 36 percent of respondents identified child care affordability as most important, followed by reliability (33%), health and safety including COVID-19 prevention (31%), and that the caregiver has a lot of experience working with kids (31%).

“ *Pre pandemic, I wanted the kids in preschool, mainly for socialization. Post pandemic, socialization wasn't the main concern anymore.* ”  
-Focus Group Participant

## WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU WHEN MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT CHILD CARE?



Following the top five responses, families also very closely prioritized (30%) caregiver reputation and positive reviews. This method used in decision making aligns with feedback from the study's initial focus groups, where participants reported turning to friends, social media, and internet searches for care recommendations.

Families reported fellow parents, friends, and relatives as go-to resources for child care advice and referrals. Teachers and child care workers are also viewed as trusted sources. Social media is a popular avenue to ask about child care, with Facebook being the most commonly utilized platform. Web searches on Google often support families finding care in their area, and reviews from other parents and program websites that show photos of children were indicators families consult. For many families, having this information in Spanish is critical.

“ *My four-year-old will start preschool at the end of August, and with the pandemic numbers rising, I wonder if it's a good idea.* ”

-Focus Group Participant



# KEY FINDINGS

## CURRENT CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Families were asked about their current child care arrangements, with options to account for who is providing care and where children are spending their time in familiar terminology used by parents. These reported choices were sorted to provide insight into three distinct categories: care in the child's home, care in another home or home-based child care (HBCC), and care in a center-based setting.

Respondents were asked to select all types of child care they utilize for their children 8 years or younger, and 83 percent of households indicated care in a home-based setting was part of their child care arrangements.

Reflective of respondents leaving the workplace or reducing hours to care for children, families reported leveraging a parent or guardian for child care needs at a noticeable rate. This study intentionally focused on child care arrangements outside of parent or guardian care, however, parent involvement rose as a theme across responses and provides a more complete understanding of how families manage their time and child care needs across a mixed delivery system.

When responses for parent and guardian involvement are disaggregated from current care arrangement data, **45 percent of households reported using some form of home-based child care – in the child's home or someone else's and by someone other than a parent or guardian – to meet their child care needs.**

Families were asked where their children were cared for most of the time, and more than 75 percent of families reported their children were care for in a home-based setting most of the time. When responses for parent or guardian care are separated, **53 percent of families reported children were spending the greatest amount of time in a home-based setting.**

Overall, 76 percent of families only leverage one category of care and 18 percent utilize two categories. When two types of care were reported, care in the child's home was included as a care option 96 percent of the time. This finding held true across single and dual income households in the study.

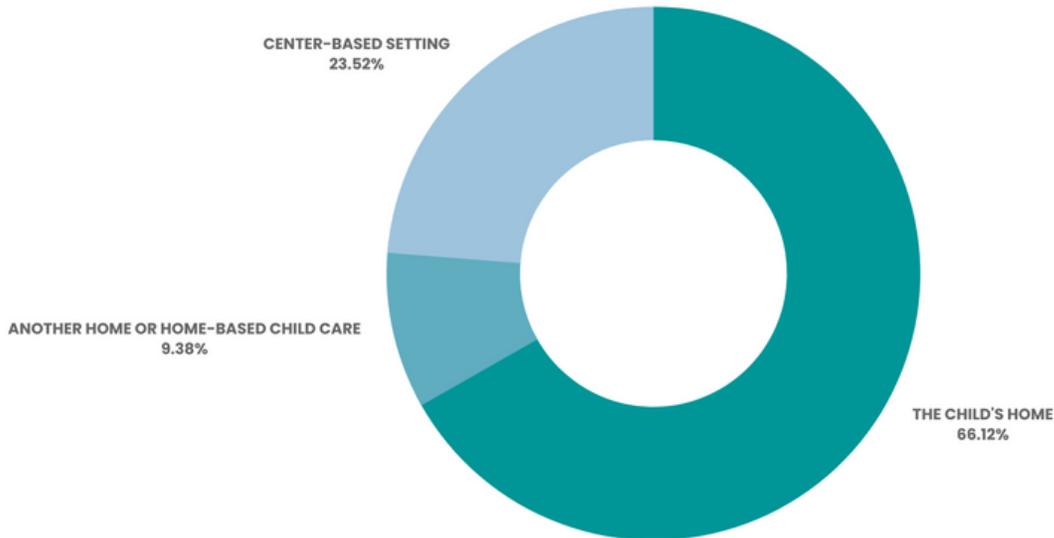
“*My mom and dad have been taking care of both my son and my sister's son at home during COVID. Juggling two kids at once brightens their day to have grandkids around. Whenever I pick my baby up, he is always busy doing something with his older cousin and there are always smiles going on.*”

-Focus Group Participant

# KEY FINDINGS

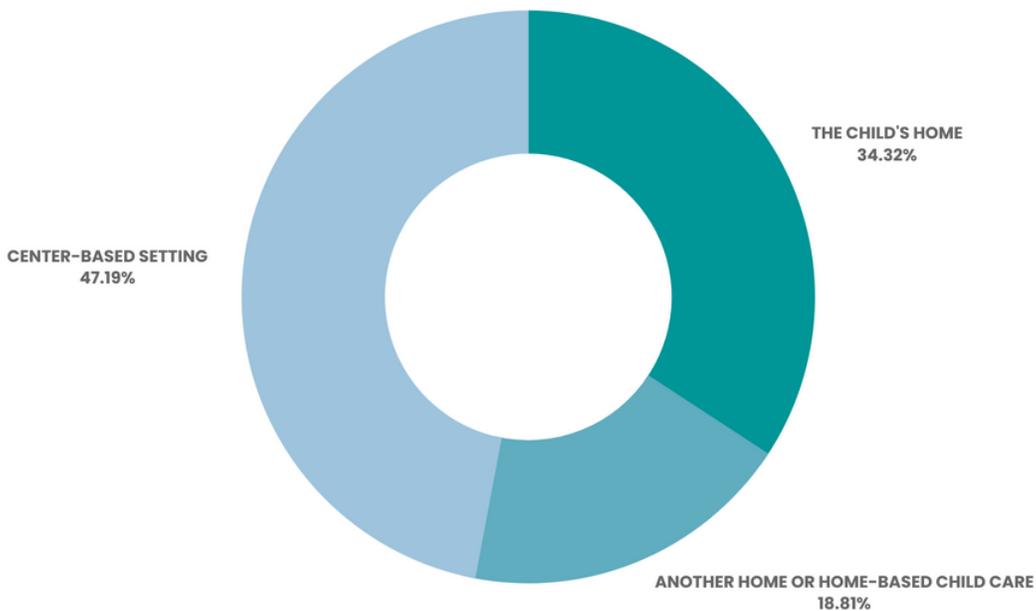
## CURRENT CARE ARRANGEMENTS

### WHERE IS YOUR CHILD SPENDING THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF TIME?



### WHERE IS YOUR CHILD SPENDING THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF TIME?

*without the parent or guardian in-home option*



*My wife and I work. Hybrid. Part remotely. At home and office. When we are home, Gabriel is with us. When we are at the office, we take him to day care or occasionally grandparents.*



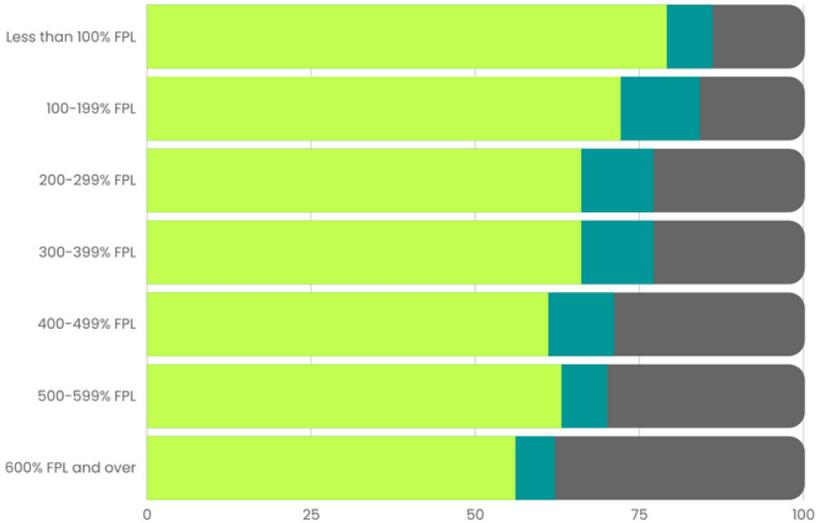
-Focus Group Participant

# KEY FINDINGS

Full time working families reported children were spending the most time in home settings across income levels. This trend continues even as parents and guardians are removed as part of the self-reported child care equation.

## CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS BY FPL

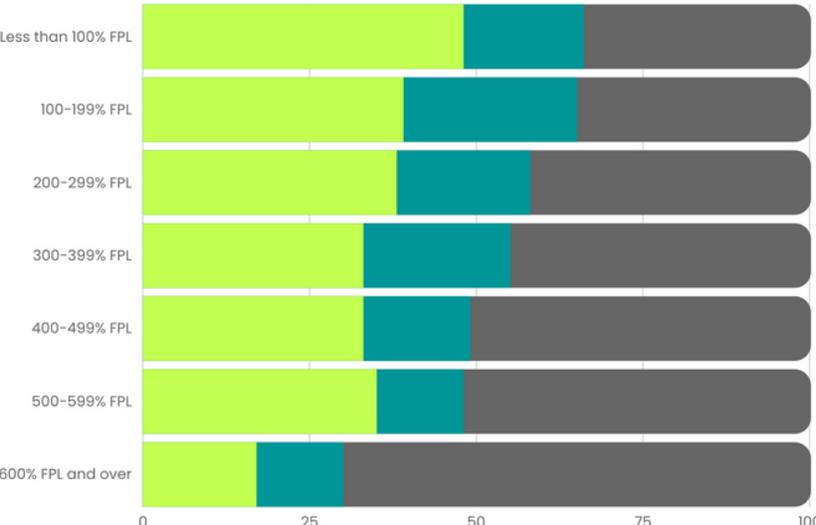
At which of the child care arrangements you selected is your child(ren) spending the greatest amount of time?



THE CHILD'S HOME    ANOTHER HOME OR HOME-BASED CHILD CARE    CENTER-BASED SETTING

## CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS BY FPL

At which of the child care arrangements you selected is your child(ren) spending the greatest amount of time? *without the parent or guardian in-home option*



THE CHILD'S HOME    ANOTHER HOME OR HOME-BASED CHILD CARE    CENTER-BASED SETTING



# KEY FINDINGS

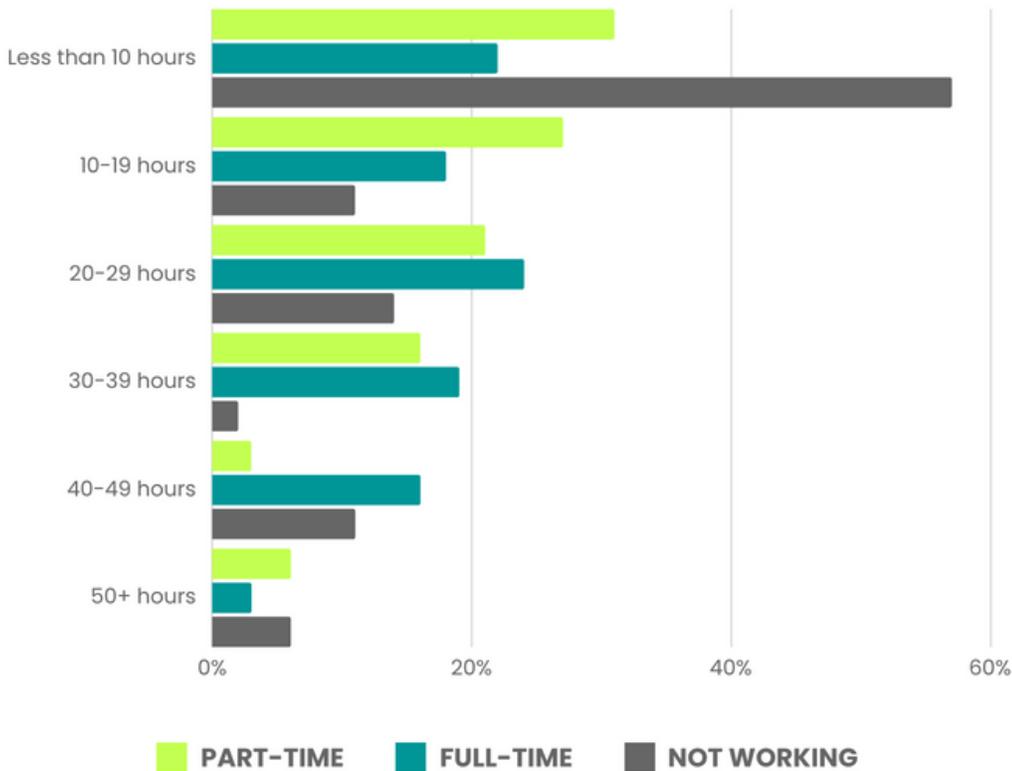
## FAMILY NEEDS & BARRIERS

Families reported on the number of weekly hours they normally need child care, and 84 percent reported normally needing less than 40 hours of care per week. Full-time working parents responded most frequently (27% of the time) needing 20-29 hours of care per week, followed closely by less than 10 hours per week (25% of the time).

64 percent of families reported needing child care on weekdays between 6:00am and 6:00pm. Some mentioned needing care in early mornings (27%) and late evenings (22%), with fewer needing care on weekends (15%) or overnight (8%).

## CURRENT CHILD CARE NEEDS

How many hours per week do you normally need child care?



“

*I believe the most pressing issue is good child care being affordable. When I had two consistently in full-time day care, we struggled financially. At the same time, I could have tried to find something a bit cheaper, but I knew my girls were well taken care of at the facility we chose.*

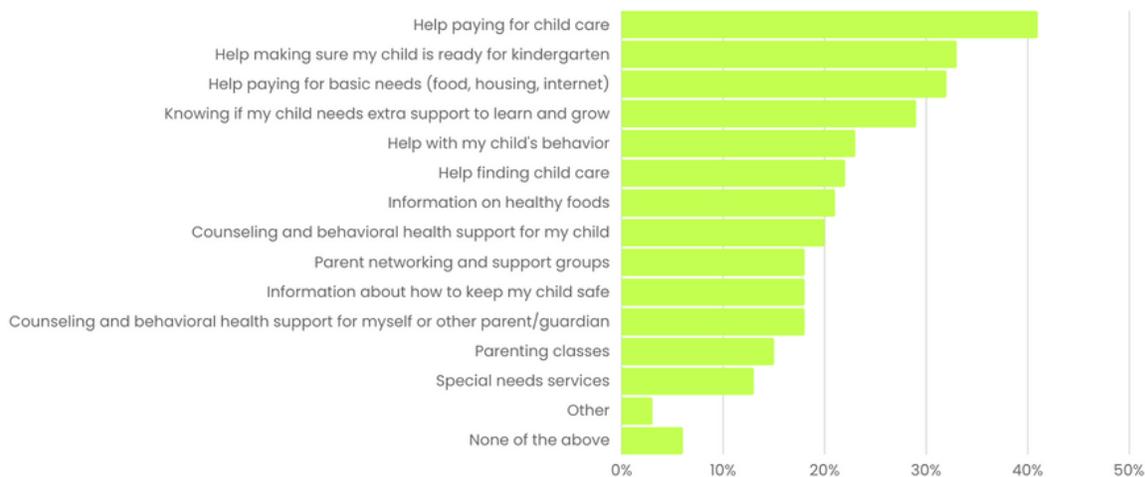
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-Focus Group Participant

## FAMILY NEEDS & BARRIERS

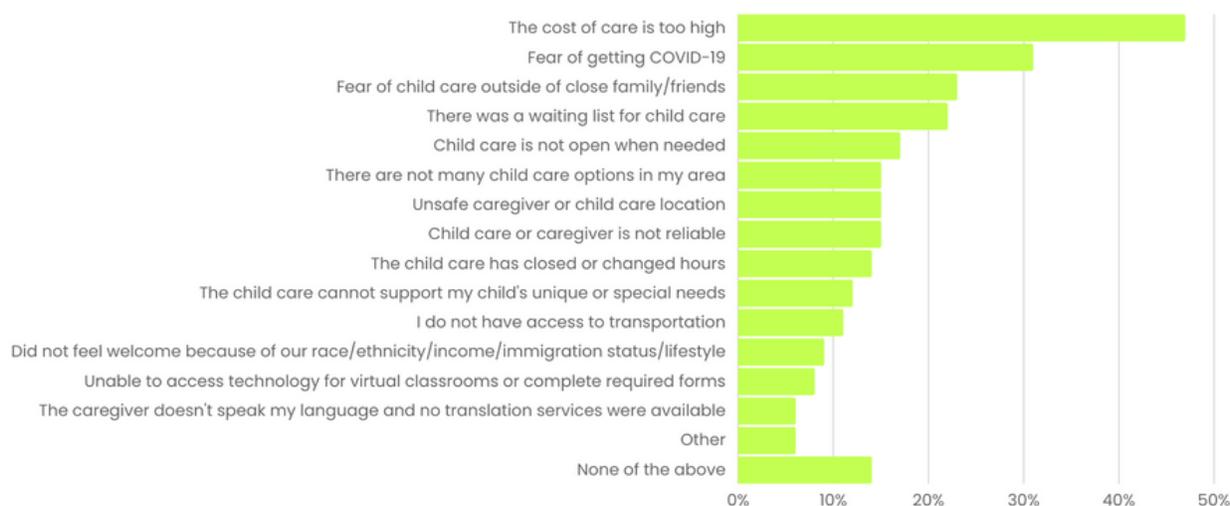
When asked, as a parent or guardian, what would be most helpful, families most commonly identified assistance paying for child care (41%), help ensuring their children are ready for kindergarten (33%), and support with basic needs such as food, housing, and internet (32%).

### WHAT WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL TO YOUR FAMILY?



When asked about barriers families experienced when choosing child care, the cost of care being too high was reported by 47 percent of respondents.

### CHILD CARE BARRIERS



“ *The DES provider we have chosen is full. Even though I have assistance with paying, it doesn't make a difference.* ”

-Focus Group Participant

# PREFERRED CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Families were asked about their “perfect world” child care arrangements if cost and availability were not an issue, segmented across two age groups (children under age 3 and children 3+) to accommodate the potential for changing needs and priorities of families at different ages and stages. Respondents could select more than one category of care to include as part of their ideal arrangements if they preferred more than one type.

## BIRTH TO THREE

**86 percent of parents of infants and toddlers ages 0-3 reported care in their own home as part of their perfect world scenario for this group**, with 67 percent wanting part of that arrangement to include care by a parent or guardian. Care in the child’s home by a relative and care in the child’s home by a babysitter were the second and third most frequently preferred types of care (24% and 22% respectively).

**Overall, 90 percent of parents with infants and young toddlers listed a home-based arrangement, either in the child’s home or in another home or HBCC, as part of their ideal. 35% of parents with children under age 3 included some form of center-based options in their preferred care composition.**

Following respondent trends, care at home by a parent or guardian was often reported as the preferred option for infants and toddlers ages 0-3. **Separating these selections to understand preferred care options outside of a parent or guardian shows 50 percent of parents still report a home-based setting as part of their ideal arrangement even if they are not providing care.** 43 percent of parents included care in the child’s home by someone other than a parent or guardian, while care in another home or HBCC was included in 19 percent of responses and a center-based setting was included in 35 percent of perfect world arrangements for this group.



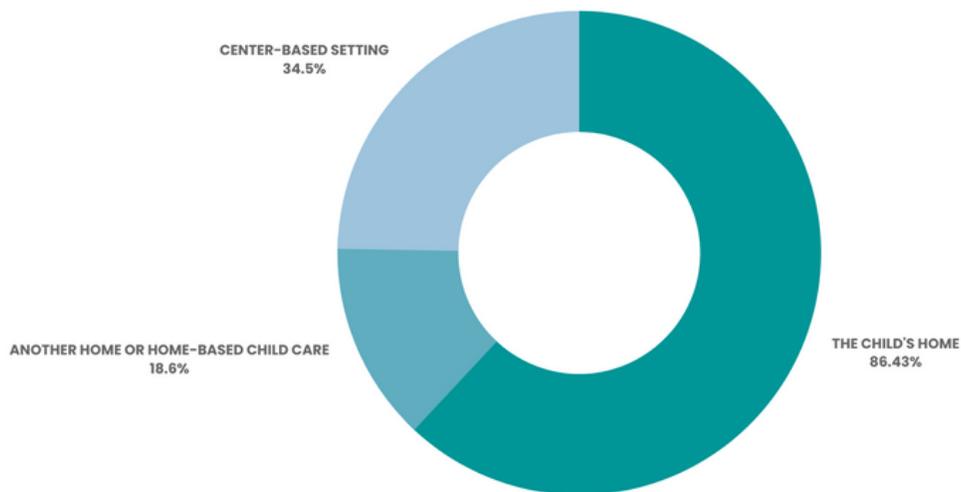
***It would be mom or dad watching him full-time so we could enjoy his adolescent years. I know it would make us the happiest and it would only strengthen the bond we have with our boy. I think he would be very happy to see mommy and daddy every day all day.***

-Focus Group Participant

## PREFERRED CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

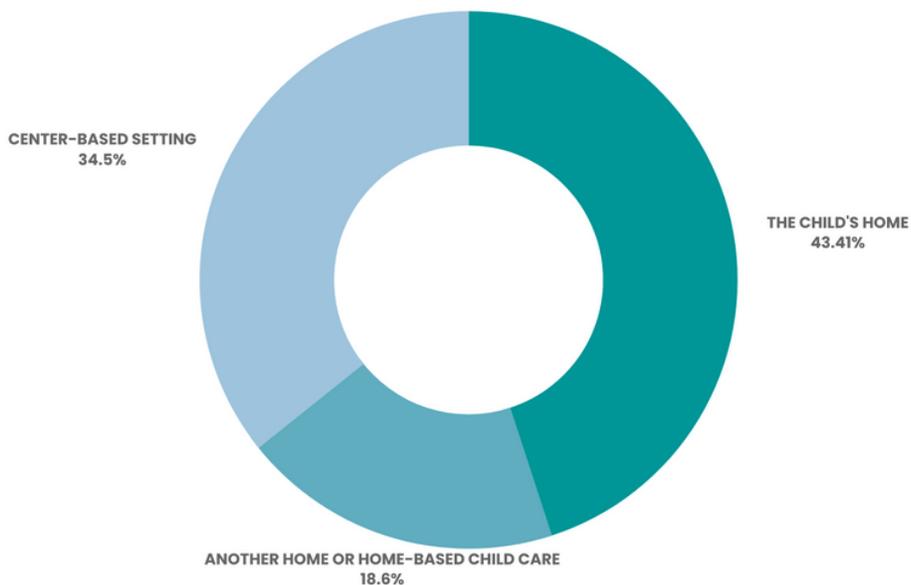
### PERFECT WORLD CHILD CARE SETTING – BIRTH TO THREE

If cost and availability were not a problem, what would your perfect world child care arrangement include for your child(ren) under age 3?



### PERFECT WORLD CHILD CARE SETTING – BIRTH TO THREE

*without the parent or guardian in-home option*



“

***I think it is currently very ideal. She gets to spend time in an educational setting and also gets time to bond with her grandparents.***

–Focus Group Participant

”

Of parents and guardians with children under three at home, 40 percent only selected they want their children in this age group at home, and 7 percent only selected they want children in this age group in a center-based setting. From a mixed delivery perspective, 82 percent of parents who only chose one care type as their ideal identified care in the child's home as their preferred arrangement. When a parent or guardian is not included and only one form of care is preferred, 54 percent identified care in the child's home by someone else as ideal and 37 percent identified a center-based setting. When more than one care type was included, 95 percent of parents wanted care in the child's home as part of the blend of arrangements.

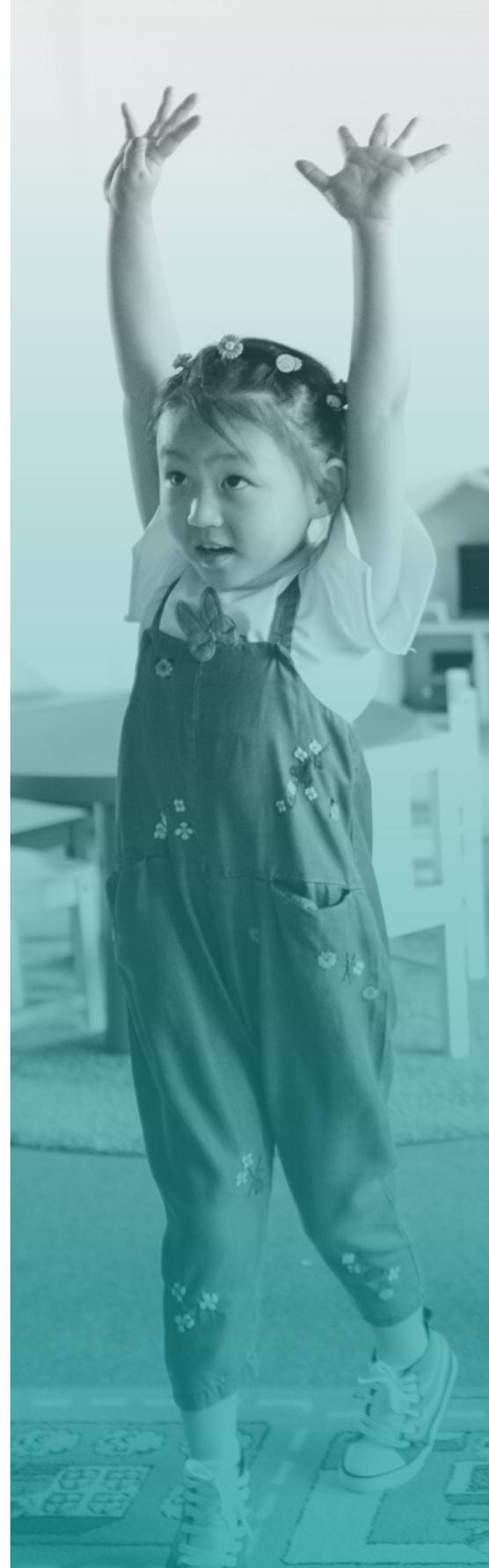
# PREFERRED CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

## THREE AND OLDER

**80 percent of parents with children three and older included care in their own home as part of their perfect world scenario**, with 56 percent wanting part of that arrangement to include care by a parent or guardian. Care in preschool and care in the child's home by a babysitter were the second and third most frequently preferred types of care (22% and 21% respectively). Care in a daycare center or similar type of professional facility was comparably selected 20 percent of the time.

**Overall, 84 percent of parents with children three and older identified a home-based setting, either their own or someone else's home, as part of their ideal arrangements.** 39 percent of parents included center-based settings for this age group.

**When a parent or guardian providing care is set aside, 51 percent of parents still included a home-based setting for children three and older in their ideal arrangements.** 43 percent included care in the child's home by someone other than a parent or guardian, while care in a center-based setting was included in 39 percent of responses and care in another home or HBCC was included in 35 percent of preferred arrangements for this group.



***In school with a wonderful and comfortable environment with other kids that they will grow with and learn with. Affordable and passionate teachers and lots of parent involvement.***

“

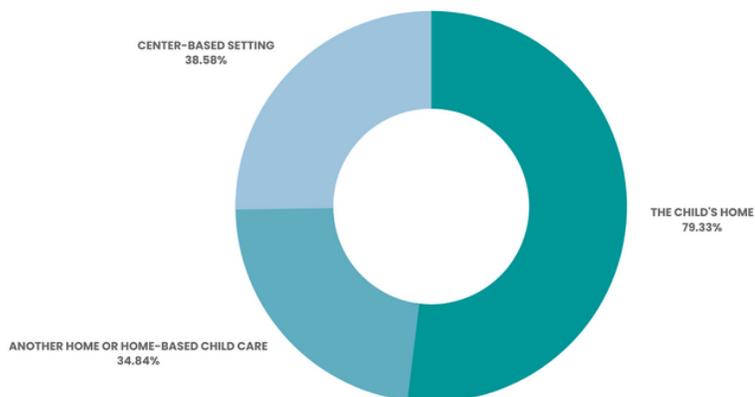
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-Focus Group Participant

# PREFERRED CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

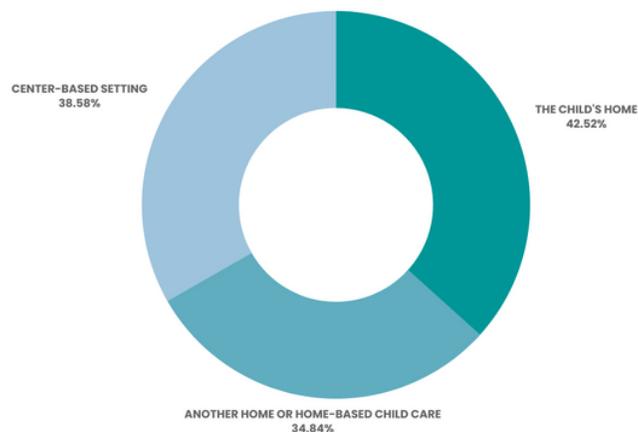
## PERFECT WORLD CHILD CARE SETTING – AGES 3+

If cost and availability were not a problem, what would your perfect world child care arrangement include for your child(ren) aged 3 and up?

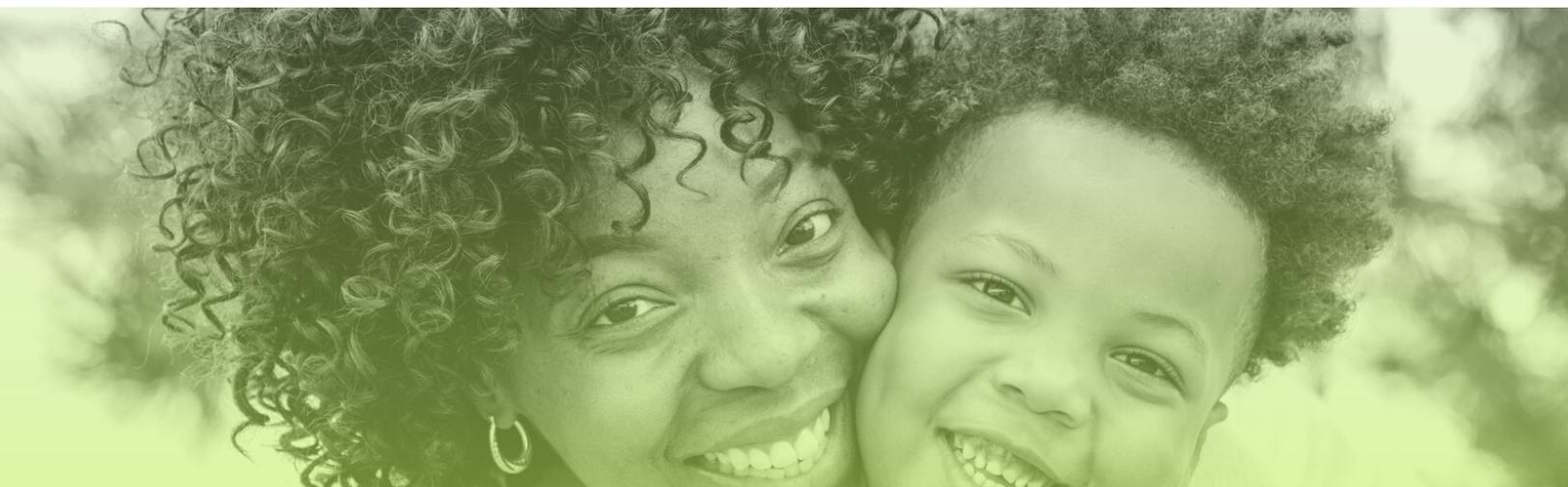


## PERFECT WORLD CHILD CARE SETTING – AGES 3+ *without the parent or guardian in-home option*

*without the parent or guardian in-home option*



Of parents and guardians with children under three at home, 33 percent only selected they want their children in this age group at home, and 7 percent only selected they want children in this age group in a center-based setting. From a mixed delivery perspective, 82 percent of parents who only chose one care type as their ideal identified care in the child's home as their preferred arrangement. When a parent or guardian is not included and only one form of care is preferred, 54 percent identified care in the child's home by someone else as ideal and 37 percent identified a center-based setting. When more than one care type was included, 95 percent of parents wanted care in the child's home as part of the blend of arrangements.



“ A day care that treats my child like family. ”

-Focus Group Participant

# CONCLUSION

This study captured statewide statistically significant feedback from Arizona's parents and families on their child care views, decisions, and preferences, as well as impacts experienced during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. A vanguard source of data for Arizona stakeholders, these results serve as a first step toward understanding the complexity of family considerations around child care and challenges families experience throughout early childhood.

***My wife is a hospital-based nurse and works two to three 12-hour shifts per week. If she's working during a weekday where school is off, either my parents or her parents watch the kids. If it's during a school day, my youngest will be in daycare starting in two weeks. If my wife works during the weekend, I watch the kids by myself.***

-Focus Group Participant

**Parents and guardians throughout the study reported affordability and support to cover the cost of care as primary needs when raising children.** Families are struggling to pay for child care at income levels well beyond most eligibility limits for assistance, influencing parent engagement in the workforce. Increases to minimum wage or bonuses intended to benefit employees can actually push families over an eligibility cliff, where they earn only a marginally greater amount that disqualifies them from support yet is still not enough to cover expenses independently. Additional research to understand the cost of quality care for families and assess eligibility needs would support the strategic alignment of workforce and child care solutions.

***I was told about different child care programs like Head Start but unfortunately did not qualify, as we made too much. Financially, we are at a point where we made too much to qualify for anything and not enough to actually afford it.***

-Focus Group Participant

***Child care is very expensive. While there are subsidies available for lower income households, I believe it is the middle class households that really struggle. They do not qualify for subsidies, yet child care eats up a huge part of their budget.***

-Focus Group Participant

# CONCLUSION

**Across Arizona and key demographics, families reported their children are most often receiving care in home-based environments and that home-based environments would be their “perfect word” child care arrangement, even for older children.** These data illuminate perhaps the starkest disconnect in early care resources, related to support for Home-Based Child Care and informal Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers. The vast majority of Arizona's child care resources bolster center-based care solutions and, just as children in these settings benefit from support, **the full spectrum of home-based child care (from formal Family Child Care to informal Family, Friend and Neighbor Care) should receive attention commensurate with usage and demand.**

**Particularly as Arizona aims to improve outcomes for all children, equitable support for quality, safety, and early education must be inclusive of and relevant for home-based environments and caregivers.**

Incorporating parent and family voice in system design and maintaining a regular pulse through feedback loops is essential as external conditions evolve and new generations of parents consider child care priorities and choices for the first time. **More data is still needed to give voice to individual communities, recognizing that one size does not fit all in family care and community dynamics.** This holds especially true, and with regard to approach, for understanding the needs, choices and preferences of unique Tribal Nations across Arizona.

Collective, data-driven solutions informed by and created with families, supporting the vision they want for early childhood, have the greatest potential to reduce barriers and inefficiencies in favor of connection and impact. For Candelen, that impact means supported communities, stronger families and brighter futures for all children.



# APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

This project initially engaged 63 parents and guardians for online focus group discussions around the impacts of COVID-19 on families, child care, and employment, as well as areas of need and utilization of support services.

Respondents were recruited statewide for a mix of age, income, gender, ethnicity, type of employment and geographic representation. Participants were screened to ensure that they were the parent or legal guardian of at least one child aged 8 or younger who was currently in a child care arrangement provided by a non-parent or guardian prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with the intention of the child returning to care post-pandemic. Respondents were also screened to ensure they were currently employed, or recently unemployed, with the intention of returning to work. The focus groups were conducted in both English and Spanish, supported by a Spanish-speaking moderator and interpreter for discussion analysis.

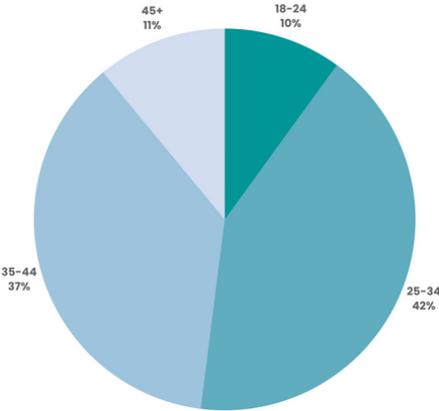
These focus groups guided question development, along with feedback from State and community partners, for the 41-question survey that deployed statewide. 608 parents and guardians with children ages 0-8 across Arizona's 15 counties responded to the online survey between November 2021 and March 2022.

With a probabilistic sample, a total of 608 responses at the 95% confidence level offers a 4% margin of error. If the survey were conducted with another random pool of 608 respondents, the results would yield within +4% or -4% of the stated totals in the reports. The margin of error can be used as a guideline to understand the reliability of these results.

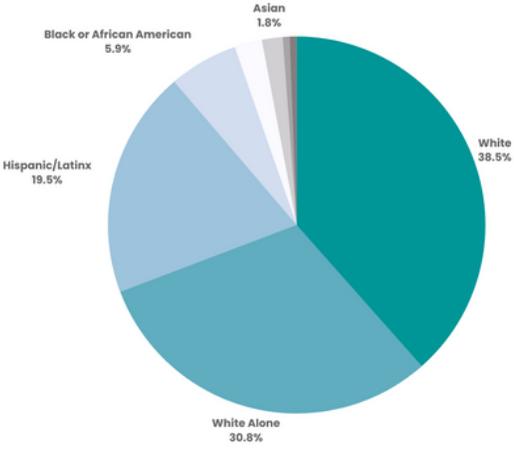


# APPENDIX B: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

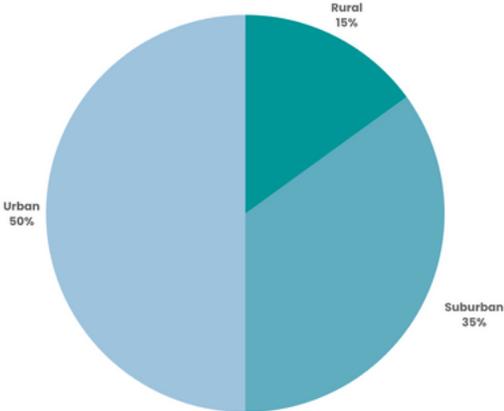
### PARENT AGE



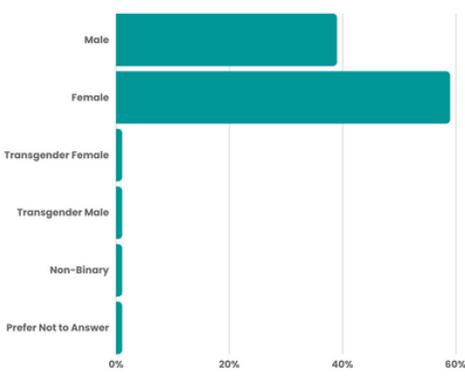
### RACE & ETHNICITY



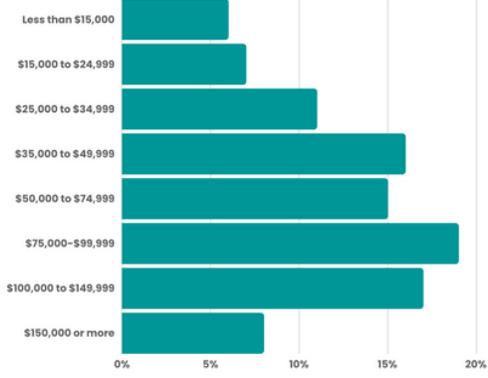
### URBANICITY



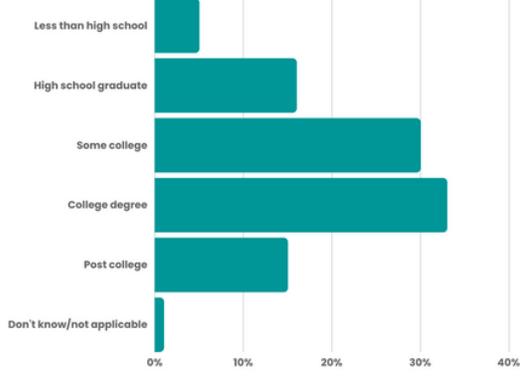
### GENDER



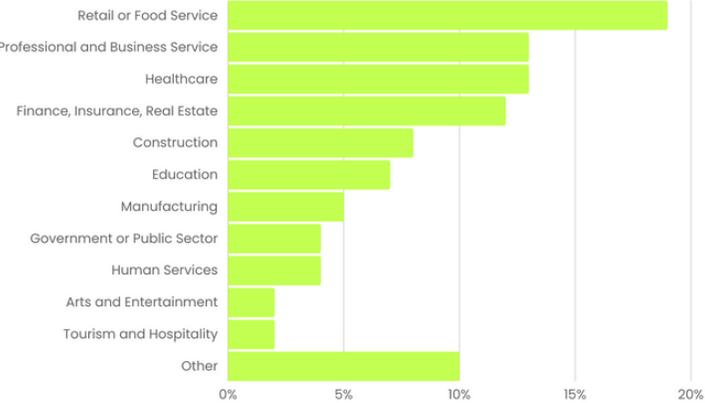
### ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



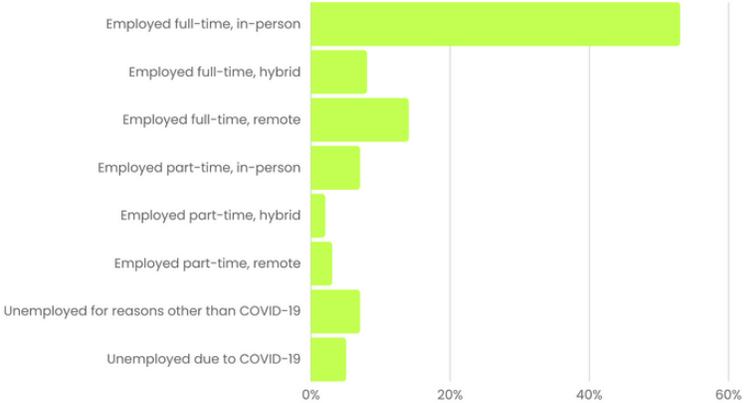
### EDUCATION LEVEL



### WORK INDUSTRY



### EMPLOYMENT STATUS



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to our project funders, Arizona Community Foundation, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, and Helios Education Foundation, for investing in the voice of Arizona's families and solutions to brighten the lives of all children.

We appreciate our research partners at Javelina Group for their work to engage parents and guardians across the state and manage data collection for this study.



 Bandelen