

**REPORT | CONSUMER EDUCATION AND
PARENTAL CHOICE IN EARLY EDUCATION (CEPC)****OPRE Report #2025-140**

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Connecting Parents' Child Care Decisions with their Needs, Information Access, and Perceived Child Care Options

Every day, parents¹ across the United States make decisions about child care and early education (CCEE). A parent's CCEE decision may be based on family and child circumstances, such as their income, child's age, and needs. It may also be based on the CCEE options available in their area. However, despite considerable research on parents' CCEE selections, little is known about how parents seek, use, and consider information when making a CCEE decision and whether parents feel they have the information they need to make informed decisions. A recent literature review (Sandstrom et al., 2024)² identified parents' preferences and priorities when searching for and selecting CCEE. However, it found few studies on parents' use of information or how much information parents had at the time they made their care decision. This report aims to address this knowledge gap to better understand the CCEE decisions that families make.

Using new nationally representative survey data, we examine how factors such as family and child circumstances and parent perceptions of local child care options are related to the CCEE decisions that parents make. We explore these factors for three distinct groups of parents of young children as defined by their most recent CCEE decision:

¹ In this document, we use the term "parents" to refer to a child's primary guardian(s), including biological parents, parent figures, legal guardians, or other individuals who are making the CCEE decision for the child.

² Sandstrom, Heather, Catherine Kuhns, Sarah Prendergast, Teresa Derrick-Mills, and Laura Wagner. 2024. *Parental Search and Selection of Child Care and Early Education: A Literature Review*. OPRE Report 2024-082. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

1. Parents who decided on a new provider who was not already caring for their child(ren) (referred to in the report as the decision group “that chose a new provider,” or “new provider”).
2. Parents who decided to stay with an existing provider (referred to in the report as the decision group “that chose to stay with an existing provider,” or “existing provider”).
3. Parents who decided to care for their child themselves (and/or by a spouse/partner) (referred to in the report as the decision group “that chose parent care,” or “parent care”).

This report uses nationally representative data from a 2024 survey of parents of children under age 6, but not yet in kindergarten, which was conducted as part of the Consumer Education and Parental Choice in Early Care and Education (CEPC) project.³ This survey, referred to throughout the report as the “CEPC Parent Survey,” sought to better understand how parents try to get, receive, and use information in selecting CCEE. The survey collected information on parents’ experiences looking for CCEE, including some parents who have often been omitted from prior research on CCEE search and selection, such as parents who use only parental care. This report uses data from 1,469 parents who had made a CCEE decision.

In this report, we focus on the survey questions that asked parents to think about their most recent child care decision.⁴ (For more information about the CEPC Parent Survey, see Appendix A.) While this brief generally uses the term “CCEE,” the questionnaire used the term “child care.” We retain that term when referring to specific questionnaire items or responses.

What CCEE Decisions Did Parents Make and Why?

Did Parents Decide on a New Provider, Stay with an Existing Provider, or Decide to Use Parent Care?

The CEPC Parent Survey asked parents to think about and report on their most recent child care decision.⁵ About a third of parents decided to stay with an existing provider (36%), and another third decided on parent care (35%). The remaining decision group (29%) chose a new provider (Table 1).

Parents and guardians, of course, routinely care for their children themselves. The decision group we define as choosing parent care decided “they or their spouse/partner would care for their children” for their most recent CCEE decision *instead of selecting a non-parent provider*. However, they may still use providers for other children or for that child at other times. Parents in this decision group may care for their children while working, stagger their work hours, or may have one or more parent who does not have any work, school, or training activities.

³ This report is one of two reports highlighting findings from the CEPC Parent Survey. The other report highlights parents’ experiences with searching for, considering, and selecting CCEE. How Parents Use Information to Search, Consider and Select Child Care and Early Education: Highlights from National Survey Data is available at: <https://acf.gov/opre/project/consumer-education-and-parental-choice-early-care-and-education-2020-2025>.

⁴ The last time parents with children under the age of 6, not yet in kindergarten made a decision about child care. For example, parents could have chosen a new provider, decided to stay with an existing provider, or could have decided to have child(ren) receive care only from their parents, just to name a few.

⁵ Parents completed the survey between March 28, 2024, and May 13, 2024.

Table 1. Percentage of Parents in Each Parent Decision Group

Parent Decision Group	% of Total	Standard Error
New provider	29%	1.45
Existing provider	36%	1.73
Parent care	35%	1.45

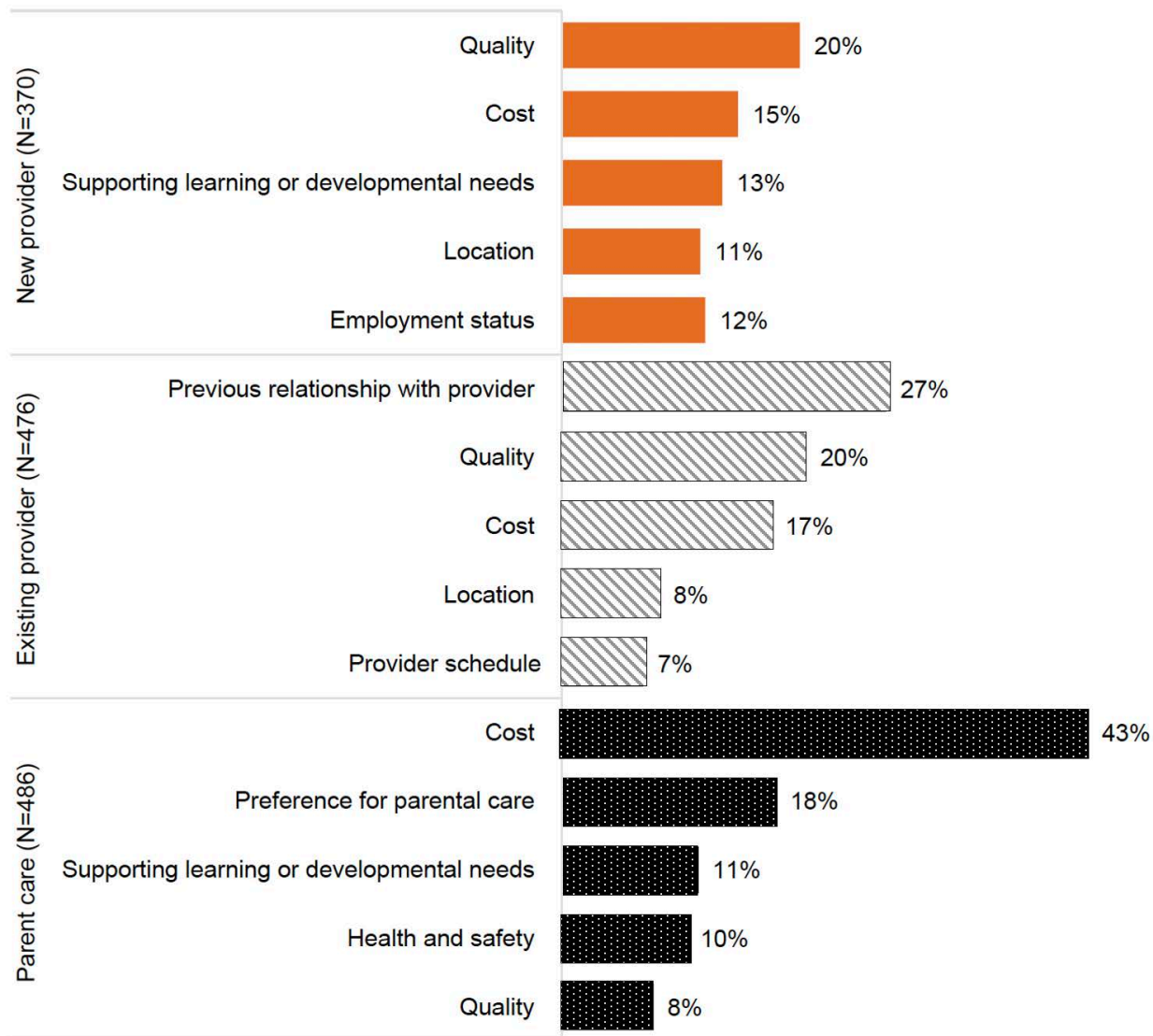
Note: Table shows weighted percentages and standard errors adjusted for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “What was the decision that you made?”

This table is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,469).

The CEPC Parent Survey also asked each parent to report the main reason they made their most recent child care decision. This was an open-ended question, with parents generally reporting one main reason for their most recent care decision. Below we highlight the top five main reasons for their care decisions, divided by decision group (Figure 1).

In each of the three groups, *cost* and *quality* were among the five reasons parents most frequently reported for making their child care decisions. However, some notable differences exist across groups. For example, while 43% of those in the parent care decision group reported *cost* as the main reason for their decision, less than 20% of parents in the other two groups cited *cost* as their main reason. *Employment status* was a top reason for almost 12% of the decision group choosing a new provider but was not in the top five main reasons for the other two groups. A *previous relationship with provider* was the top main reason for a little over a quarter (27%) of the decision group staying with an existing provider. Meanwhile, close to 18% of the decision group choosing parent care said they had a *preference for parental care*, rather than using a nonparental caregiver. This main reason was not in the top five for the other two groups. The decision group choosing parent care also placed *health and safety* in the top five, but this reason did not make the top five for the other groups.

Figure 1. Five Most Frequently Reported Main Reasons That Parents Made Their Child Care Decision, by Parent Decision Group



Note: Five most frequently reported main reasons are determined based on weighted percentages adjusted for the complex survey design (N = 1,332). The least frequently reported reasons were grouped in an “other” category that was excluded from the top five reasons shown here.

Understanding Similarities and Differences Between the Three Parent Decision Groups

Throughout this report, we focus on understanding similarities and differences between the three parent decision groups. We examine characteristics of children, families, and search experiences that other research has indicated might make a difference in parents' care decisions, including:

- Child age
- Household income
- Having a child with a condition affecting care provision
- Receiving financial assistance to pay for care
- Amount of time parents had to consider information and make a CCEE decision
- Amount of information parents had for making a CCEE decision
- Factors that made it hard for parents to find information about CCEE
- Internet access
- Number of new CCEE providers parents considered
- Number of child care options that met the family's needs

Each of these characteristics has a set of categories that we use to describe the range of children and families represented in the group. For example, child age includes the categories of children 0–2 years old, 3–4 years old, and 5+ years old. As seen in Figure 2, below, each decision group has children in each age group. Figure 2 also shows that the percentages of parents with children in each age group (the “distribution”) looks a bit different from one group to the next. What Figure 2 can't show, just by looking at it, is whether the differences are just by chance, or if they are systematic; we need statistical tools for that.

We use the Chi-squared Test of Homogeneity statistical tool to compare the parent decision groups two at a time (in pairs) to see if the distribution of the characteristic differs between the two groups. The test asks, “Do the percentages of parents in each category differ for these two decision groups?” The paired comparisons are: new provider vs. existing provider (labeled *new:existing*), new provider vs. parent care (*new:parents*), and existing provider vs. parent care (*existing:parents*). We say two groups have different distributions when we are 95% certain that the differences are not just due to chance. Another way to understand the finding that distributions for a characteristic differ between two decision groups is to say that the characteristic relates to one decision differently from how the characteristic relates to the other decision.

For Figure 2, below, the statistical tools help us understand that the ‘distribution’ of ages of children in the existing provider decision group is different from the ‘distribution’ of ages of children in either of the other two groups. However, the ages of children in the decision group choosing a new provider and the group choosing parent care are similar. In this case, that matches what we can already see visually, but sometimes it is hard to tell just by looking.

The chi-squared test does not compare one category at a time (for example, the % of parents with a child 3-4 year olds), but rather compares all of the categories for one decision group with all of the categories for the other decision group. The test also doesn't say how the two distribution differs, only that it does. Sometimes we can look visually and describe generally how the distributions differ. For Figure 2, it appears that the children for whom an existing provider was chosen are generally older than the children for whom the other two decision groups made decisions.

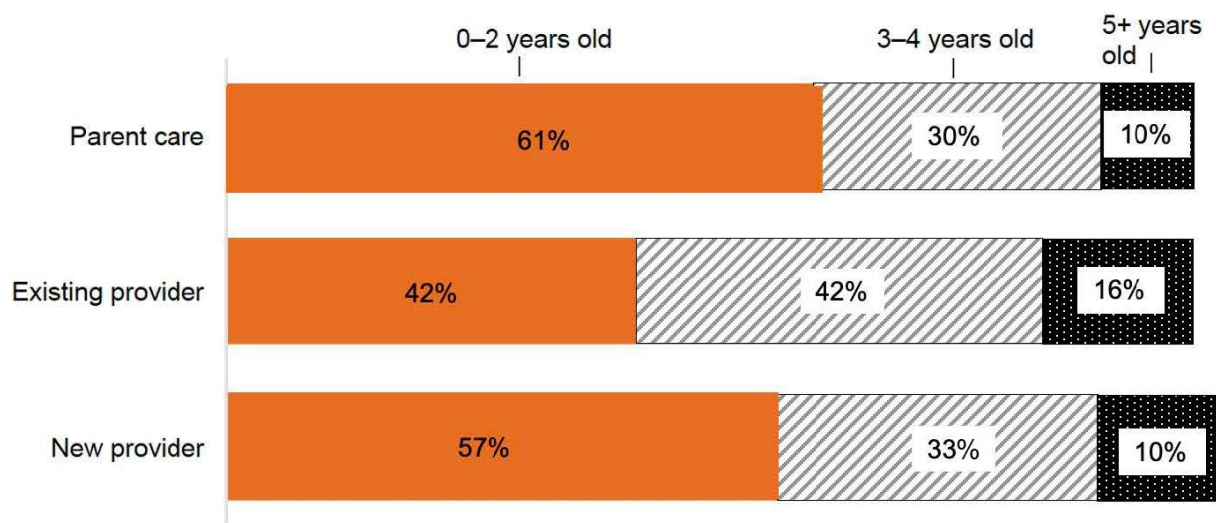
Understanding Parents' CCEE Decisions

As noted above, parents often consider various factors when making their child care decisions. The CEPC Parent Survey asked parents about these factors, including their family and child circumstances, their child care information use, and their perceptions of available options that met their family's needs (see Appendix B, Table 1 for a list of survey questions and response categories).

Family and Child Circumstances

Overall, about half of parents reported that they made their most recent child care decision for a child under age 3. However, the parent decision group that stayed with an existing provider differed from the other two groups (new provider and parent care) in the distribution of the age of the child for whom they had made the decision. In general, the parents staying with an existing provider had made their decision for older children than the other two groups. The other two decision groups' child age distributions were not different from one another.

Figure 2: Age of Child for whom Parents Made Their Most Recent Child Care Decision, by Parent Decision Group



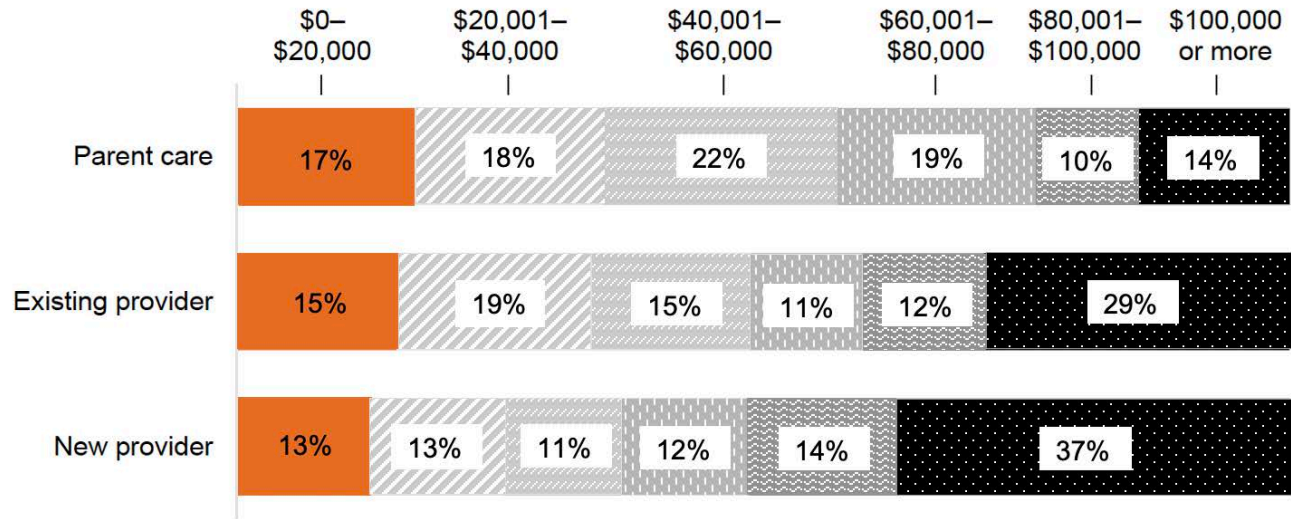
Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design.

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,301).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of child age between new:existing (p -value = .011), existing:parents (.002), and new:parents (.738). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

Distributions of household income also differed across parent decision groups (Figure 3). The decision group choosing parent care had a different income distribution both from the group that chose a new provider and from the group that stayed with an existing provider. The group choosing parent care generally had more families in the middle income categories and fewer at higher incomes.

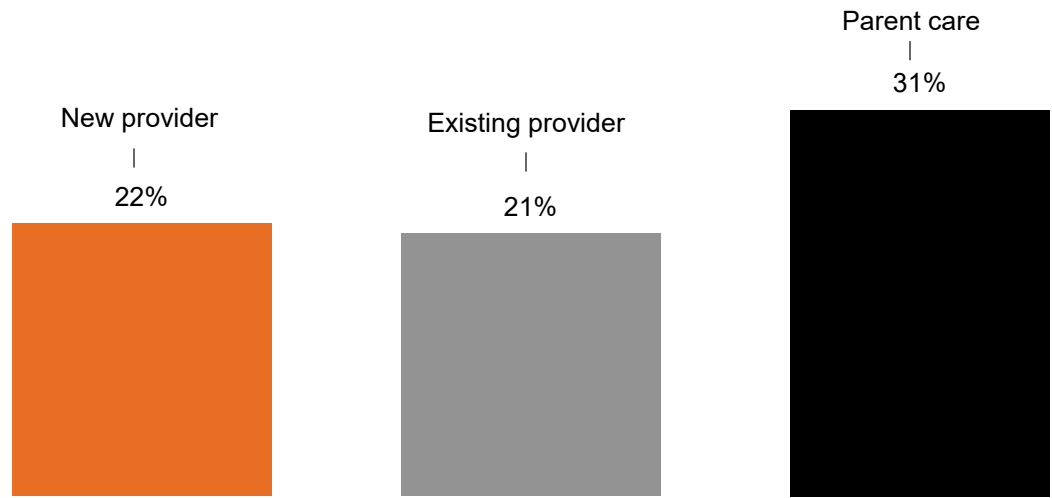
Figure 3: Household Income by Parent Decision Group



Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design.
This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,453).
The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of household income between new:existing (p -value = .201), existing:parents (.003), and new:parents (< .001). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

The survey also asked parents about children with a condition affecting care provision. Overall, across the full sample, a quarter (25%) of parents reported that they had a child with a physical, emotional, developmental, or behavioral condition that affects the way the parent provides care for the child. (This may or may not have been the child for whom the CCEE decision was made.) A higher percentage (31%) of those in the decision group for parent care had a child with a condition affecting their care, compared with the decision group staying with an existing provider (21%; see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Child with a Condition Affecting Care Provision by Parent Decision Group

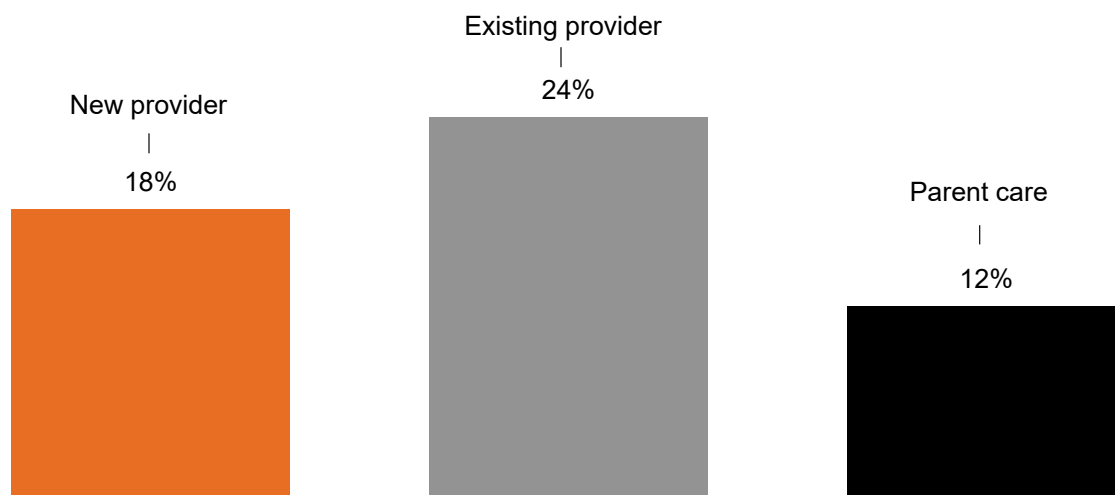


Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. For “child with a condition affecting care provision”, the survey asked parents to report whether they had a child with a physical, emotional, developmental, or behavioral condition that affects the way they provide care for them.

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,467).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of child condition between new:existing (p -value = .844), existing:parents (.041), and new:parents (.080). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

Additionally, parents responded to survey items about receiving child care financial assistance. One in five parents (18%) overall indicated they had received child care financial assistance in the prior 12 months. A higher percentage of parents had received child care financial assistance in the prior 12 months among parents who decided to stay with an existing provider (24%) than among parents who decided to care for their child themselves (12%; see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Receipt of Financial Assistance, by Parent Decision Group

Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design.

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,449).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of financial assistance between new:existing (p -value = .148), existing:parents (.003), and new:parents (.148). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

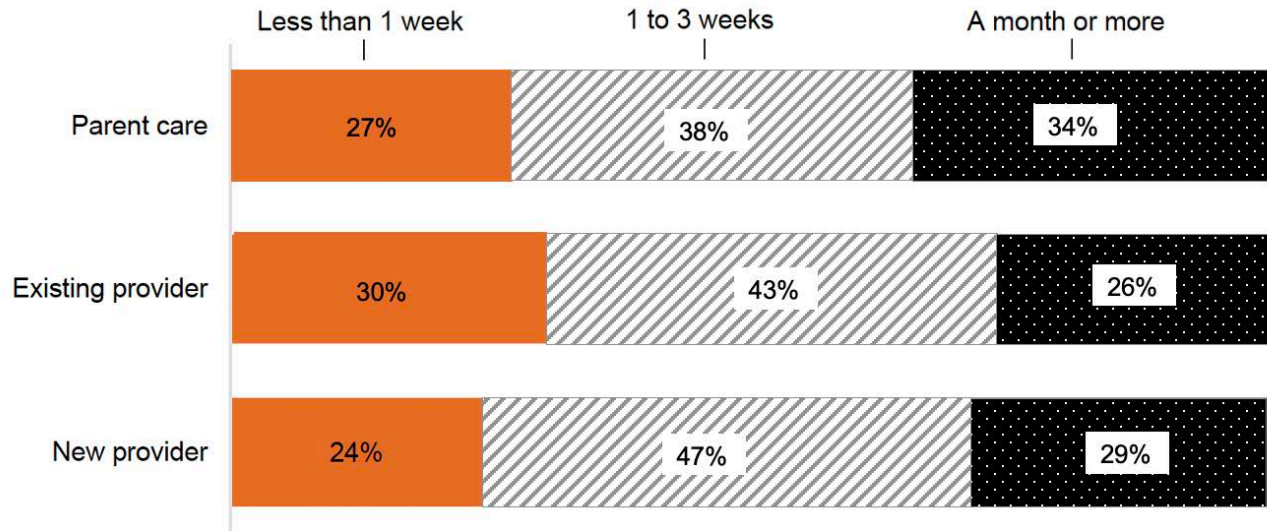
Having Access to and Using CCEE Information

Parents may use information about CCEE that they have gathered or received from different sources to make CCEE decisions, yet little previous research exists on this topic (Sandstrom et al. 2024). To help fill this gap, the CEPC Parent Survey asked parents about their access to and use of information about CCEE. Overall, parents reported spending an average of 13 hours looking for information, including time talking with other people, visiting providers, reading about different options, or any other activities to get information for their decision, before making their child care decision. The average number of hours was similar across the parent groups (11.3 hours for the decision group that stayed with an existing provider, 12.4 hours for the group that chose a new provider, and 14.5 hours for the group that chose parent care).⁶ Note that parents who decided on parent care spent an average of 14.5 hours looking for information before making their child care decision, indicating that at least some parents in this decision group were looking for information about child care options in their area.

Findings also show similarities across the parent decision groups in the amount of time parents had to consider information and make their child care decision (Figure 6). Overall, 70% of parents had three or fewer weeks to consider information and make a decision. Parent decision groups did not differ in their distributions of the amount of time they had to consider and make a decision.

⁶ The chi-square test is not appropriate for numeric values like the number of hours. Instead, we performed ANOVA tests between the three pairs of decision groups; those tests indicate no significant differences at the 5% level in average hours spent looking for information.

Figure 6: Amount of Time Parents Had to Consider Information and Make a Child Care Decision, by Parent Decision Group



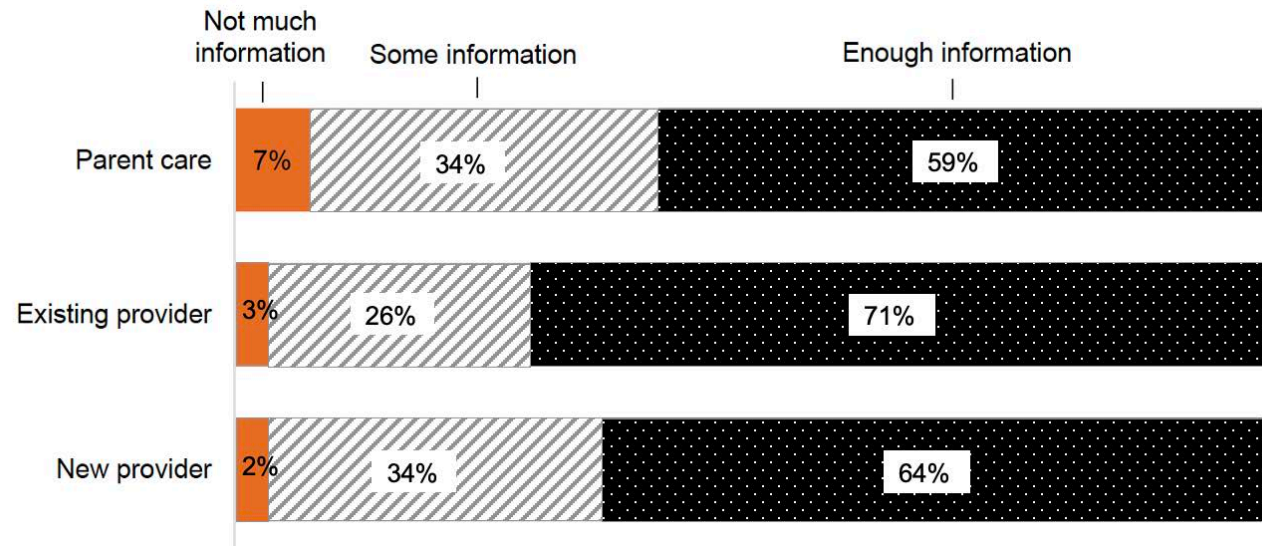
Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “How many weeks did you have to consider information and make that decision about this/these child(ren)’s child care?”

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,449).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of number of weeks considering information between new:existing (p-value = .209), existing:parents (.209), and new:parents (.209). All p-values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

Parents have varying amounts of information that they may use when making care decisions. The CEPC Parent Survey asked parents whether they felt they had enough information at the time they made their care decision, whether they had some (but not enough) information, or whether they did not have much information at all (Figure 7). Nearly two-thirds (65%) of parents overall reported having enough information when making their child care decision. However, there were some notable differences by parent decision group. The distribution of whether parents had enough information when they made their decision differed between the decision group that chose parent care and the other two decision groups (new provider and existing provider). Parents who decided on parent care generally said they had less information to make their decision than the other decision groups. Only a small percentage of parents reported not having much information at all (between 2% for the group that chose a new provider and 7% for the group that chose parent care).

Figure 7: Amount of Information Parents Had at the Time They Made Their Care Decision, by Parent Decision Group



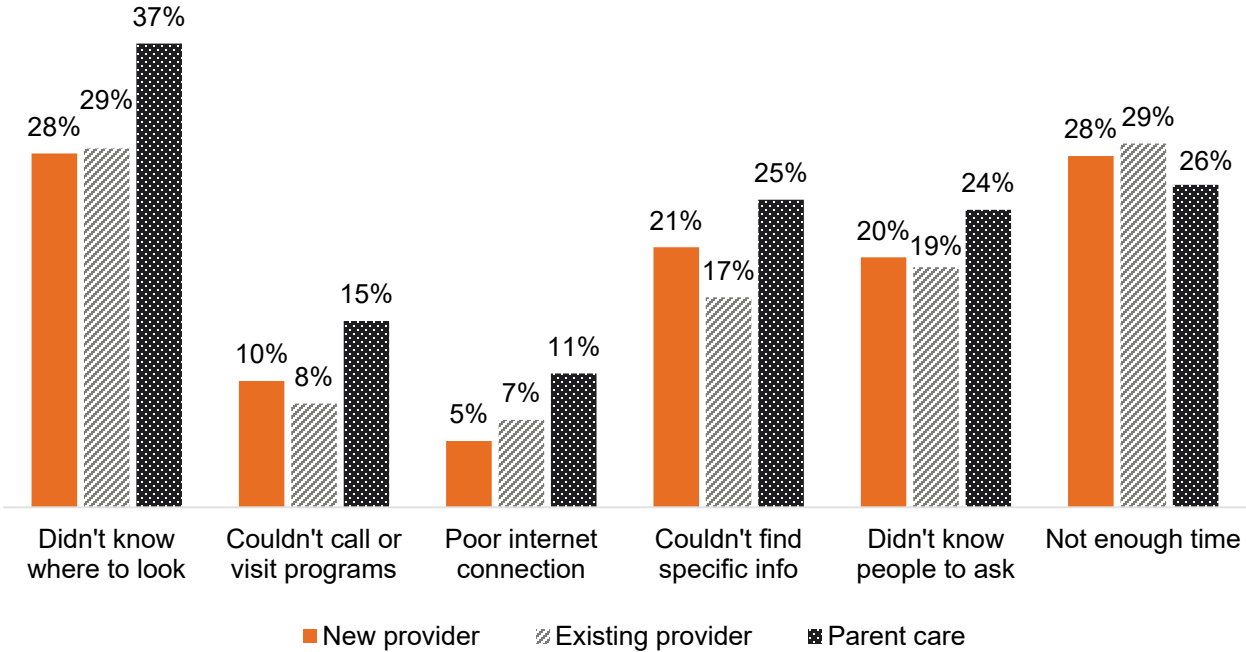
Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “When choosing who will care for their children, families may consider what they need for schedules, cost, and children’s experiences. When you made that decision, would you say you ...”

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,447).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of the amount of information between new:existing (p -value = .129), existing:parents (.020), and new:parents (.037). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

While a majority of parents overall said they had enough information to make their care decision, some parents reported challenges in getting the information they wanted about child care. For example, a higher percentage of parents in the parent care decision group (11%) than in the new provider decision group (5%) reported that a poor internet connection made getting information difficult (Figure 8). Parent decision groups did not differ significantly on the other factors they were asked about.

Figure 8: Factors That Made It Hard for Parents to Find Information about Child Care, by Parent Decision Group

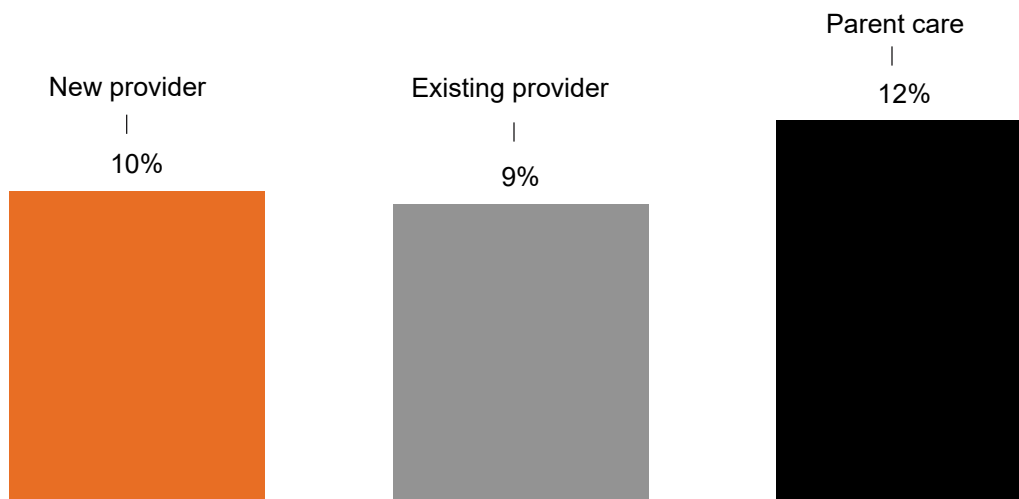


Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question "Have any of the following made it hard for you to get the information you wanted about child care?"

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,252).

The pair-wise chi-square tests results are shown in Table C1.

In addition to reporting challenges related to poor internet connection, parents could report living in households without internet access (Figure 9). Overall, one in ten parents (10%) indicated they lived in households without access to the internet, with similar rates across the three parent decision groups.

Figure 9: Households Without Internet Access, by Parent Decision Group

Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design.

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,469).

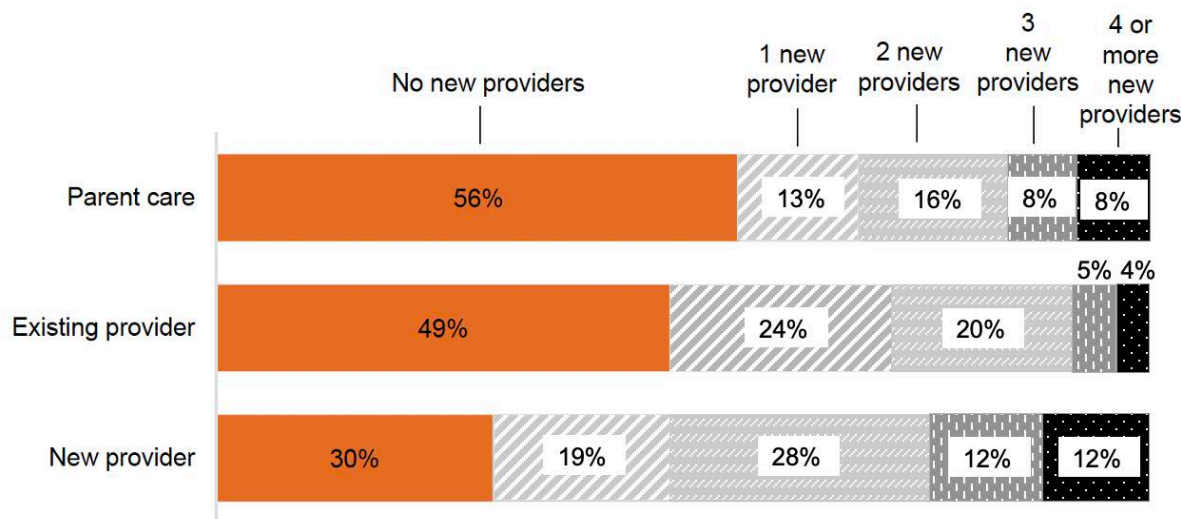
The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of internet access between new:existing (p -value = .875), existing:parents (.749), and new:parents (.749). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method

Available CCEE Options That Meet Families' Needs

When making a child care decision, parents may consider one or more new providers or they may not consider any new providers. Parents who do not consider any new providers may consider existing providers they already know about, or they may look for providers but not find any that can be considered (for example, due to limited local supply or specific needs the family has). Overall, more than half (54%) of parents who made a child care decision considered new providers. The distribution of the number of new providers considered by parents differed between each pair of parent decision groups (see Figure 10). The decision group that chose parent care generally considered fewer, if any, new providers, while the decision group that chose a new provider generally considered more new providers than the other decision groups.⁷ Alternatively, we can say that the number of new providers parents considered is related to the CCEE decision in a different way for each of the three decision groups.

⁷ Please see the "Understanding Similarities and Differences Between the Three Parent Decision Groups" text box below Figure 1 for assistance interpreting the results on differences between parent decision groups.

Figure 10: Number of New Providers Parents Considered, by Parent Decision Group



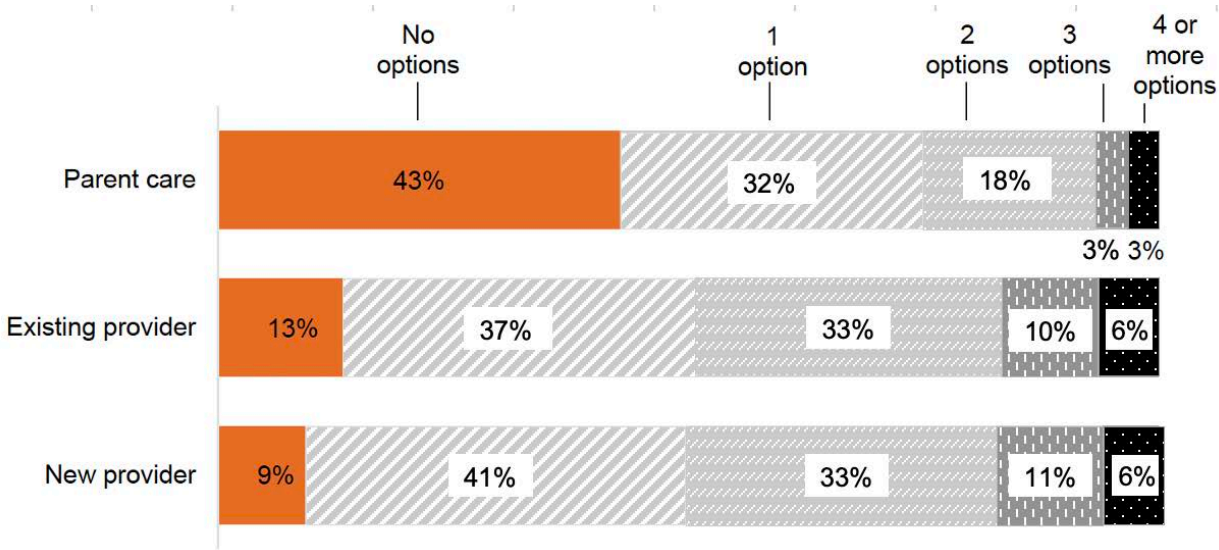
Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “To make that decision, did you consider any new providers who weren’t already caring for this/these child(ren)?”

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,451).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of number of new providers considered between new:existing (p -value < .001), existing:parents (.001), and new:parents (< .001). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

When deciding who will care for their children, parents consider their family’s needs, such as needs related to schedules, cost, parental work, children’s experiences, and other needs (Betancur et al. 2025; Sandstrom et al. 2024). Some families may not find any options that meet their needs, while other families may find multiple options that meet their needs. Overall, 78% of parents reported having one or more option that met their family’s needs. The parent decision group that chose parent care differed from the new and existing provider decision groups in terms of the distribution of the number of options that met the families’ needs (Figure 11). Parents who decided on parent care generally reported finding fewer options that met their families’ needs.

Figure 11: Number of Options That Met Family's Needs, by Parent Decision Group



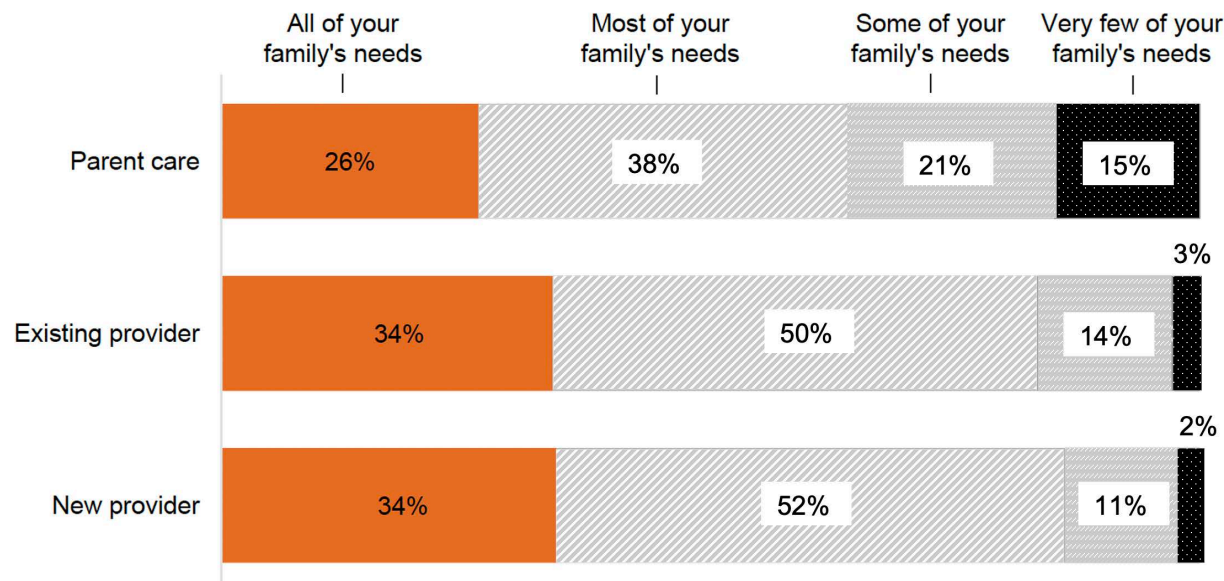
Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “How many options for child care did you have when you made that decision?”

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,450).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of number options between new:existing (p -value = .678), existing:parents ($< .001$), and new:parents ($< .001$). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

The CEPC Parent Survey also asked parents to report on whether their care decision met their family's needs. For some families, their child care decision met all or most of their family's needs while for other families their child care decision met some or very few of their family's needs (Figure 12). Overall, about three-quarters (76%) of parents who reported a child care decision reported that the decision met all or most of their family's needs, while 16% said the decision met some and 8% said the decision met very few of their family's needs. The distribution of how well the decision met their family's needs differed for the parent care decision group compared to the other decision groups (new and existing providers). Parents who decided to care for their child themselves generally reported that their child care decision met fewer of their family's needs compared to the other two decision groups.

Figure 12: How Well Decision Met Family's Needs, by Parent Decision Group



Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “How well did your decision meet your family’s needs, for example, related to schedules, cost, parental work, children’s experiences, and other factors?”

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,450).

The pair-wise chi-square tests compare the distribution of level of needs met between new:existing (p -value = .841), existing:parents ($< .001$), and new:parents ($< .001$). All p -values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method.

Decisions Meeting Families' Needs: Family Circumstances Across Parent Decision Groups

We also explored the relationships between family circumstances and whether a care decision met the family’s needs. In this section, we combine all three decision groups, and instead, use different family circumstances, such as child age, internet access, and household income to create comparison groups. We then used these groups to examine how well their decision met the family’s needs. We conducted chi-squared tests comparing the distributions of how well the decision met the family’s needs within each of the family circumstances shown in Figure 13. (For more on chi-squared tests, see the Understanding Similarities and Differences Between the Three Parent Decision Groups sidebar after Figure 1.)

The distribution of family needs being met differed for parents making a decision for a 0–2 year old compared to 3–4 year olds or children 5 years or older. Decisions reported about the youngest children generally met more of families’ needs.

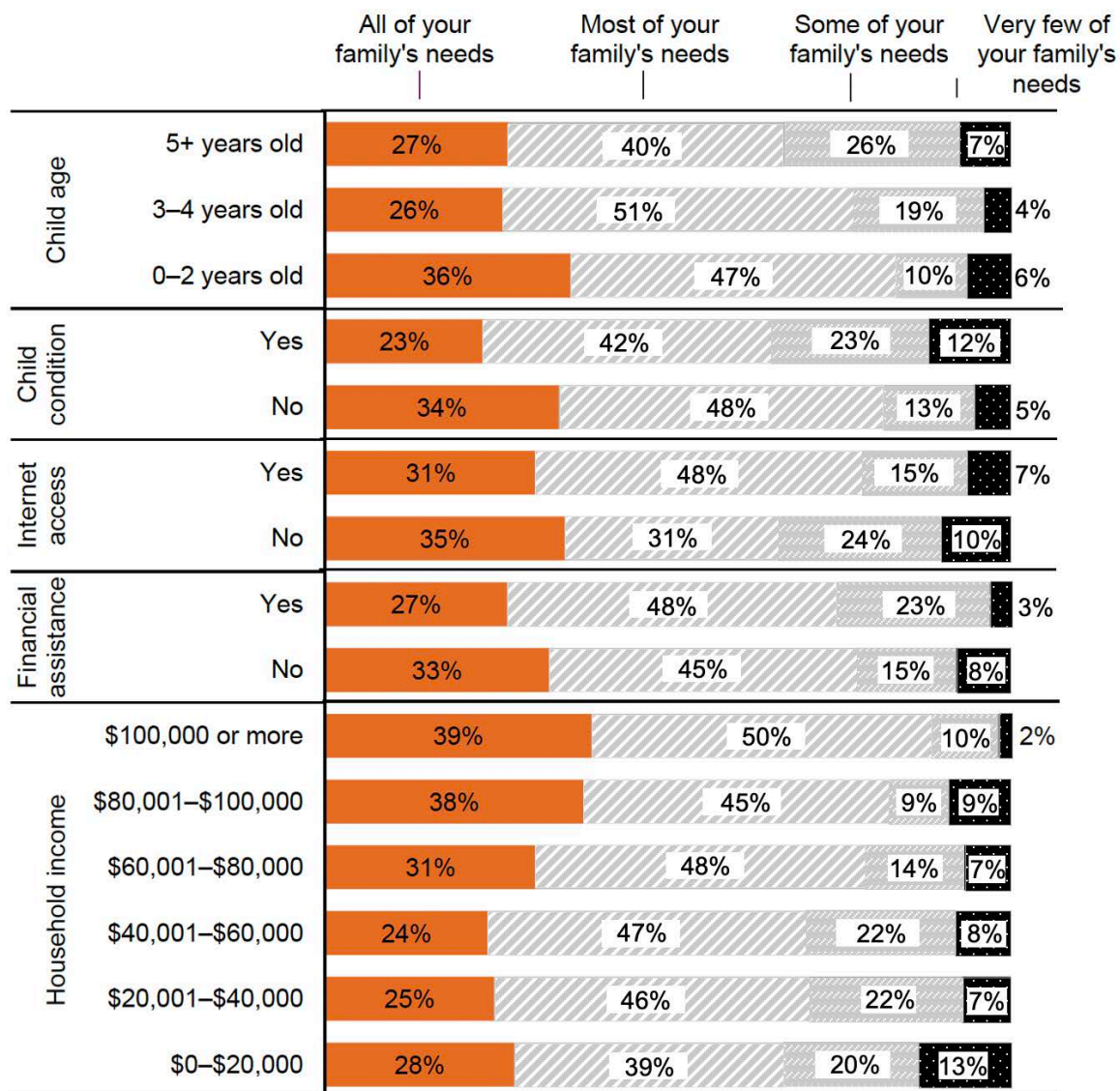
The distribution of family needs being met differed for parents who did or did not have a child with a condition affecting provision of care. The decision for parents who did not have a child with a condition affecting provision of care met more of families’ needs.

Internet access was associated with differences in the distribution of family needs being met by the child care decision. Generally, families not having internet access more often had only some or very few needs met.

The distribution of family needs being met differed based on whether the parents had received child care financial assistance in the past 12 months. However, it is difficult to identify a pattern for how the distributions differ; the distribution of needs met at each level (all, most, etc.) is not consistently higher or lower for families who did or did not receive financial assistance.

The distribution on how well the child care decision met families' needs differed for parents with household incomes of \$100,000 or more, compared to parents in each lower household income category. Generally, the child care decisions made by the highest-income parents met more of their families' needs than those of parents with lower incomes.

Figure 13: Whether Decision Met Families' Needs, by Family Circumstances



Note: All percentages are weighted to adjust for the complex survey design. Responses to the survey question “How well did your decision meet your family’s needs, for example, related to schedules, cost, parental work, children’s experiences, and other factors?”

This figure excludes nonresponse and is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N = 1,450).

The pair-wise chi-square tests results are shown in Table C2.

Discussion and Implications for Consumer Education Practices

This report explored three distinct parent CCEE decision groups – parents who chose a new provider, parents who stayed with an existing provider, and parents who decided on parent care. Findings in this report highlight the similarities and differences between these parent decision groups in terms of their family and child circumstances, the main reasons they made their child care decisions, their assessments of the amount of information they had when making their decisions, and their perceptions of the local child care options available to meet their family and child's needs. Exploring these factors by parent decision groups can help us connect experiences in the process of searching, considering, and selecting CCEE with parents' decisions and how well those decisions meet their families' needs.⁸

Parents Deciding on Parent Care

Researchers and practitioners have had relatively little information about parents who choose to care for their children themselves (Sandstrom et al., 2024). While some families have stay-at-home parents or preferences not to use nonparental care, it has been difficult to understand if there might be “unmet demand” for CCEE among parents who are caring for their children themselves but would like to have nonparental care if they had options that met their needs. Indeed, preferring to care for children themselves was a commonly reported reason parents in the parent care decision group made their choice. The findings in this report, however, indicate that many in the decision group that chose parent care did consider using a provider. This decision group encountered many challenges, including having less adequate information, considering fewer new providers, and having fewer options that met their family's needs. In addition, two in five (43%) parents in this decision group cited cost as the main reason they made their decision, much higher than the other two decision groups.⁹ Finally, the decisions made by parents in this group generally met fewer of their family's needs than those of parents in the other two groups. The decision group selecting parent care emerges as a group whose needs could potentially be better met through consumer education.

Parents' Reasons for Making Their Decision and Relevant CCEE Information

Parents' reasons for making their CCEE decision varied across the different parent decision groups, although there were some similarities. For instance, for each of the parent groups, cost and quality were in their top five considerations, with cost being the number one consideration for families who decided to care for their children themselves. Cost emerges as a significant challenge for many families across all three parent decision groups. Although information about child care subsidies and how to apply for them is almost always part of publicly funded consumer education, not all families

⁸ Please see Table 1 in Appendix B for a more detailed comparison across each of the parent decision groups.

⁹ Among parents in the parent care decision group, 15% mentioned that they stopped working as a result of their child care decision, much higher than the less than 1% of the two other two decision groups who mentioned the same. Since not all parents were asked about stopping work, this comparison across groups is more tentative than with other data in this brief, which were collected similarly from all three decision groups.

can receive subsidies (due to eligibility requirements, wait lists, availability of providers, etc.). Cost information and resources for families who are not able to receive child care subsidies would be valuable to many families. For example, consumer education providers could add easy connections to other publicly funded programs (such as Head Start or state pre-kindergarten), referrals to privately funded financial assistance where available, or information on potential variability in costs due to part-time enrollments or using family child care providers.

Parent and Child Circumstances and Meeting CCEE Needs

Perhaps the most important outcome of consumer education is for families to be able to make decisions that meet their needs. The data indicate that parents with household incomes of \$100,000 or higher differ significantly in how well their child care decisions met their families' needs compared to parents with lower household incomes. This finding is likely related to cost being a main reason that so many parents made the decision that they did. As we note above, consumer education efforts currently tend to emphasize subsidies as an option to increase affordability; this emphasis is needed and valuable. However, consumer education could increase value to parents by looking beyond subsidies to help parents find other ways to find care that will meet their needs (which includes care that is affordable to parents). For example, parents may not be aware of home-based care options, which can be more affordable for some families, opportunities to apply for publicly funded programs other than child care subsidies, options to use part-time care, or opportunities for private assistance such as sliding-scale fees or employer assistance to pay for care.

Another relevant finding is that parents who did not have internet access had different distributions of having their needs met, generally associated with having very few of their families' needs met. This finding can be troubling given how much consumer education today relies on online communication and resources. Policymakers and consumer education providers may want to consider how we can make sure that parents without internet access also receive support from consumer education.

Appendix A. About the Data Used in This Brief

Data in this brief come from the CEPC Parent Survey, which was administered using the NORC AmeriSpeak Panel (a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population). Data represent U.S. households with at least one child under the age of 6, but not yet in kindergarten. This brief reports on analyses of interviews with 1,469 parents or guardians who reported having made a decision about child care (out of 2,035 total parents or guardians participating in the survey).

The CEPC Parent Survey asked parents to report on their experiences with finding and/or receiving information about child care, the different types of information about child care they may have looked for and/or found in the last 12 months, as well as information they did not find but would find most helpful about child care options in their area. The survey also asked parents to report on their most recent child care decision and factors related to their child care search in general. In addition, the survey asked parents to report on the types of child care the household is currently using and general household demographic information.

Data were collected between March 28, 2024, and May 13, 2024, and the survey was available in both English and Spanish. Parents could take the survey either by telephone or online. More information about AmeriSpeak is available at <https://amerispeak.norc.org/>.

Appendix B. List of Survey Questions and Response Categories

Table B1: Survey Questions and Response Categories

Survey Questions	Response Categories
FAMILY/CHILD CIRCUMSTANCES	
Child with a Condition Affecting Care Provision: <i>“Do any of these children under the age of 6, not yet in kindergarten have a physical, emotional, developmental, or behavioral condition that affects the way you provide care for them?”</i>	Yes/No
Child Age: <i>“How old was the child at the time you made that decision? If you made that decision about multiple children, please report the age in years and months of the youngest child at the time you made that decision.”</i>	Open-ended
Financial Assistance: <i>“In the past 12 months, did anyone in this household receive child care financial assistance such as subsidies, vouchers, scholarships, or certificates for children of working parents? These programs may also be open to parents who are in school or training.”</i>	Yes/No
Household Income: <i>“Which of the following categories do you think best describes your total household income after taxes from all sources last year?”</i>	\$0 - \$20,000; \$20,001 - \$40,000; \$40,001 - \$60,000; \$60,001 - \$80,000; \$80,001 - \$100,000; \$100,000 or more (Choose one)

Survey Questions	Response Categories
ACCESSING AND USING CHILD CARE INFORMATION	
Hours Spent Looking for Child Care Information: <i>“How many hours did you spend looking for information to help you make that decision about this/these (child/children)’s child care? (For example, please include time talking with other people, visiting providers, reading about different options, or any other activities that you did to get information for your decision.)”</i>	Open-ended
Weeks to Consider Child Care Information: <i>“How many weeks did you have to consider information and make that decision about this/these child(ren)’s child care?”</i>	Less than 1 week; 1 to 3 weeks; A month or more (Choose one)
Amount of Child Care Information: <i>“When choosing who will care for their children, families may consider what they need for schedules, cost, and children’s experiences. When you made that decision, would you say you ...”</i>	Had enough information; Had some information, but not enough information; Did not have much information at all (Choose one)
What Made It Hard to Get Information About Child Care: <i>“Have any of the following made it hard for you to get the information you wanted about child care?”</i>	Not enough time to look for information; Didn’t know where to look for information; Poor internet connection; Couldn’t find information that told me what I wanted to know; Didn’t know people I could ask; Was not able to call or visit programs (e.g., due to transportation issues, work schedules, COVID-19 restrictions on visitation); It was not hard to get the information I wanted about child care [Exclusive]; Other (Choose all that apply)
Household Internet Access: <i>“What kind of internet access do you have”</i>	Dial-up; DSL; cable broadband (Choose all that apply); Recoded to Yes/NO

Survey Questions	Response Categories
AVAILABLE CHILD CARE OPTIONS THAT MEET FAMILY'S NEEDS	
Consider New Providers and How Many: <i>"To make that decision, did you consider any new providers who weren't already caring for this/these child(ren)?" "Did you consider one new provider or more than one new provider?"</i>	Yes/No If Yes: 1 new provider; 2 new providers; 3 new providers; 4 or more new providers (Choose one)
Number of Options that Meet Family's Needs: <i>"Deciding where to send a child for child care can be a hard decision. There are lots of things to consider such as schedules, cost, and children's experiences. This can make it difficult to find a provider that meets all your family's needs. How many options for child care did you have when you made that decision? Would you say you had ..."</i>	No options that met my family's needs; 1 option that met my family's needs; 2 options that met my family's needs; 3 options that met my family's needs; 4 or more options that met my family's needs (Choose one)
How Well Decision Met Family's Needs: <i>"How well did your decision meet your family's needs, for example, related to schedules, cost, parental work, children's experiences, and other factors? Would you say it met ..."</i>	All of your family's needs; Most of your family's needs; Some of your family's needs; Very few of your family's needs (Choose one)

Appendix C. Decisions Meeting Families' Needs Chi-Square Test Results

Table C1. Chi-Square Test Results for Factors That Made It Hard for Parents to Find Information about Child Care by Parent Decision Group (for Figure 8)

Comparison Groups	Adjusted <i>p</i> -value
DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO LOOK	
New: Parents	0.183
Existing: Parents	0.183
New: Existing	0.921
COULDN'T CALL OR VISIT PROGRAM	
New: Parents	0.135
Existing: Parents	0.135
New: Existing	0.570
POOR INTERNET CONNECTION	
New: Parents	0.046
Existing: Parents	0.318
New: Existing	0.486
COULND'T FIND SPECIFIC INFO	
New: Parents	0.393
Existing: Parents	0.182
New: Existing	0.393
DIDN'T KNOW PEOPLE TO ASK	
New: Parents	0.533
Existing: Parents	0.533
New: Existing	0.833
NOT ENOUGH TIME	
New: Parents	0.810
Existing: Parents	0.810
New: Existing	0.810

Note: Table shows adjusted *p*-values for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995). This table is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N=1,252).

Table C2. Chi-Square Test Results for Whether Decision Met Families' Needs by Family Circumstances (for Figure 13)

Comparison Groups	Adjusted <i>p</i> -value
COMPARISON BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
\$0–\$20,000: \$100,000 or more	< 0.001
\$40,001–\$60,000: \$100,000 or more	< 0.001
\$20,001–\$40,000: \$100,000 or more	0.001
\$80,001–\$100,000: \$100,000 or more	0.008
\$60,001–\$80,000: \$100,000 or more	0.043
\$20,001–\$40,000: \$80,001–\$100,000	0.093
\$40,001–\$60,000: \$80,001–\$100,000	0.093
\$0–\$20,000: \$80,001–\$100,000	0.116
\$0–\$20,000: \$60,001–\$80,000	0.351
\$0–\$20,000: \$20,001–\$40,000	0.519
\$20,001–\$40,000: \$60,001–\$80,000	0.519
\$40,001–\$60,000: \$60,001–\$80,000	0.519
\$60,001–\$80,000: \$80,001–\$100,000	0.519
\$0–\$20,000: \$40,001–\$60,000	0.550
\$20,001–\$40,000: \$40,001–\$60,000	0.984
COMPARISON BY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	
No: Yes	0.009
COMPARISON BY CHILD CONDITION	
No: Yes	< 0.001

Comparison Groups	Adjusted <i>p</i> -value
COMPARISON BY INTERNET ACCESS	
Non-internet household: Internet household	0.007
COMPARISON BY CHILD AGE	
3–4 years old: 0–2 years old	0.001
0–2 years old: 5+ years old	0.001
3–4 years old: 5+ years old	0.227

Note: Table shows adjusted *p*-values for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995).

This table is restricted to parents who made a child care decision (N=1,469).

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