How Parents Search for, Consider, and Select Child Care and Early Education: A Conceptual Framework

In this report, we present a conceptual framework for how parents[1] search for child care and early education (CCEE), consider information about and their options for CCEE, and select CCEE care for their children. We also discuss factors that shape how parents search for, consider, and select CCEE, including what can make the process harder and how research suggests parents can best be supported during this process.

The purpose of this conceptual framework is to help researchers, policymakers, and administrators better understand the process that parents go through when looking for CCEE for their children. To illustrate various parts of the conceptual framework, we provide examples throughout the report of experiences parents may have. These examples show how parents may have different experiences, depending on their circumstances and the needs of their families. However, these examples cannot capture the specific circumstances of every family. We therefore also discuss how the search experience can vary from family to family, from parent to parent, and even from child to child within the same family.

Did you know?

According to the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education, nearly half (48.5 percent) of infants and toddlers under age 3 and more than two-thirds (68.1 percent) of children ages 3 through 5 and not yet in kindergarten spent at least 5 hours a week in nonparental care (Datta et al. 2023). In 2019, 30 percent of parents with a child under age 6 reported searching for CCEE in the past 24 months—half of which considered more than one CCEE provider (Kabourek 2024).

---

[1] In this report, parents are defined as any adult who is a child's primary guardian, including biological parents, foster parents, parent figures, and other guardians, and in a position to make CCEE decisions for the child.

Importantly, the framework is meant to show that this process can be complex. The framework also shows that families may repeat this process multiple times, and that multiple components of the process may happen at the same time. The conceptual framework expands former models of this process by adding a "Consider" component—a nod to research findings that show that, prior to selecting where to send their children, parents take time (some more than others) to look at the information and the CCEE options they found during their search (Betancur et al. 2025; Datta et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025, Lauderback et al. 2023).

The conceptual framework is intended to serve as a guide for researchers, policymakers, and administrators who are studying, designing, and implementing strategies to help families find CCEE that meets their needs. It is based on studies from 2010 to 2025 on how parents search for and select CCEE. We describe the supporting research evidence and the level of evidence available to support the framework. Some parts of the framework have more supporting evidence than others, with some parts supported by multiple studies and others hypothesized based on related evidence but without studies directly addressing the topic. The framework can therefore help researchers understand which components require more study to build a better understanding of how parents make informed choices about CCEE and how that relates to children's CCEE access.

Exhibit 1. Definitions of Key Terms

CCEE: Child care and early education. In this report, CCEE is inclusive of center-based child care programs; home-based child care programs; care from nonparental relatives, friends, and neighbors; and publicly funded prekindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs. Although child care programs can serve school-age children, this report focuses on CCEE for children from birth to kindergarten.

Center-based care/child care center: Child care and early education services provided in a nonresidential setting; may also collectively be referred to as "centers."

Child care resource and referral agency (CCR&Rs): Local organizations that help parents locate and select child care by providing referrals to local child care providers and information on state licensing requirements, child care subsidies, child care quality, and available services for children.

Child care subsidy: Financial assistance that reduces out-of-pocket child care costs to parents and guardians. States and territories receive funding from the federal government to provide financial assistance to help families with low incomes pay for nonparental child care so they can work or attend school. Eligibility requirements are different in each state.

Consumer education: Information provided to the public to help parents make informed choices about child care services. The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) requires states, territories, and some Tribes to provide transparent information to parents about the nonparental child care choices available to them and how providers are meeting regulations and to encourage providers to improve the quality of their services. This information may include child care monitoring and inspection reports and information on program features and quality, though the details vary from state to state.

Home-based care: Care for one or more children in a home setting, typically in either the provider's home or the child's home. Care can be paid or unpaid and from family (other than a parent), friends or neighbors, or from someone who operates a child care business in their home. Depending on state requirements, a home-based provider may be legally required to be licensed or registered if caring for a certain number of children for a certain number of hours in a day. Also known as "family day care," "home daycare," "home-based child care," or "family child care."

Nonparental care: Any child care provided by someone who is not the child's parents.

Overview of the Framework

The conceptual framework (presented as a visual in Exhibit 2) reflects the process parents go through to decide what, if any, CCEE they may use for their child(ren). The process consists of three main components, which make up the framework's structure. Each component shown in the visual includes several bolded activities to describe what parents do or experience in that part of the process. The three main components are:

- **Search:** Parents look for and receive information or advice about CCEE. As part of the search, parents identify possible care options and may contact providers.

- **Consider:** Parents review and evaluate information gathered on CCEE options. This includes evaluating and comparing options, assessing if information is sufficient to select a provider, revisiting priorities, and considering tradeoffs.

- **Select:** Parents make decisions about CCEE. This can include selecting a new provider, deciding to stay with an existing provider, or using parent-provided care only.

We hypothesize that all parents generally move through the process of "Search," "Consider," and "Select" in some way, even though *how* and *when* they go through the process may be different. These components may not necessarily occur in order or as three separate steps; they may occur at the same time or be repeated. For example, parents may consider the information they find on CCEE while they search for information. Also, while some parents may have a good idea who their preferred provider is (for example, the child's grandparent or an existing provider for another child) before beginning a search, we hypothesize that some of these families nonetheless go through the full "Search," "Consider," and "Select" process. Therefore, each component of the process may be quick, but they still take place as parents confirm that a desired arrangement is feasible.

In this section, we describe how we developed the framework. We also describe key considerations, like knowing why parents are searching for CCEE, and provide examples of how parents' experiences might vary. Next, we provide more details on each of the three components of "Search," "Consider," and "Select."

Framework design

To create the conceptual framework described in this report, we drew on recent studies done as part of the Consumer Education and Parental Choice in Early Care and Education (CEPC) project as well as a larger body of literature in the field (see Sandstrom et al. 2024 for full literature review). Synthesizing available evidence, we identified the key features of parents' processes and experiences related to searching for, considering, and selecting CCEE. We used this synthesis to create the framework, which was designed to reflect findings from the research and to articulate several examples of how parents may go through the process.

Why parents start a CCEE search

Parents start a CCEE search for many reasons, and understanding those reasons can help us understand parents' experiences searching for CCEE. Evidence shows that a search is usually triggered by an event that necessitates new nonparental care or a transition to a new care provider, such as a change in the family's situation or in a child's developmental needs (Betancur et al. 2025; Davis et al. 2014; NSECE Project Team 2014; Pilarz, Sandstrom, and Henly 2022; Vesely 2013; Vesely et al. 2021).

Common reasons to begin a search include the birth or adoption of a new child, a parent returning to the workforce or changing jobs, or residential moves. Other examples relate to a current or potential child care provider. For example, a child care provider may close their business or a grandparent providing regular child care may express a desire to reduce their caregiving role. One study found that a parent may begin a search if a provider changes their hours, policies, or staffing in a way that no longer meets the family's needs (NSECE Project Team 2014). Similarly, a parent may begin a search if concerns about care quality prompt them to look for care elsewhere (Davis et al. 2014; Pilarz, Sandstrom, and Henly 2022; Scott and Abelson 2016; Speirs, Vesely, and Roy 2015).

A parent's desire to better meet their child's development needs may also make them start a search. For example, sometimes a child may reach an age at which the parent thinks the child should be in a more educational setting or a more formal setting with other children (NSECE Project Team 2014). Children's particular needs, such as identifying a developmental delay, may also prompt parents to seek a CCEE provider that can support those needs (Costanzo and Magnuson 2019; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012).

Knowing the reasons parents are searching for CCEE and how much time families have to search for and select a CCEE provider can be helpful. Parents engage in the process of searching for, considering, and selecting CCEE with these reasons in mind—and the process may be easier or harder, depending on the reason and how quickly they need to find a provider.

Examples of the process families may go through when looking for CCEE

To further explain the framework, the second page of the visual in Exhibit 2 shows four example experiences of how families may navigate the "Search," "Consider," and "Select" process and how their experiences might vary based on community and personal factors. These four examples are not intended to describe all possibilities but rather serve as visual representations of how each family goes through the process in its own way. These examples include the following:

- **Example 1 – moving directly through the process:** This is shown in the visual with a straight line. These parents move directly from "Search," to "Consider," to "Select," without revisiting components.

- **Example 2 – searching and considering multiple times before selecting:** This is shown in the visual with a line that moves between "Search" and "Consider" multiple times to indicate these

parents could not immediately locate a provider that met their needs based on the information they were initially able to find.

- **Example 3 – considering and selecting multiple times:** This is shown in the visual by a line that goes back and forth multiple times between "Consider" and "Select" to indicate that some parents have to reconsider their options after making an initial decision.

- **Example 4 – searching, considering, and selecting multiple times:** This is shown in the visual with a line that returns multiples times from "Search" to "Consider" and also from "Consider" to "Select"—meaning these parents could not immediately locate a provider to meet their needs and then they also had to reconsider their options after making an initial decision.

Although we hypothesize that all families go through the three components of the process, these four examples highlight that the exact route and/or challenges families experience may vary. The straight line running directly through "Search," "Consider," and "Select" shows a relatively easier process where parents did not have to repeat any components of the process. The second and third examples show parents looping through different components multiple times. This means that they had to revisit their search for information (Example 2) or, before selecting a provider, to reconsider the information they gathered (Example 3). Example 4 represents a particularly challenging scenario where parents needed to revisit multiple components of the process. It is likely that parents who experience something like Example 4 take more time in their CCEE decision-making process than parents experiencing Example 1, but that is not necessarily the case. We hypothesize that the amount of time it takes to go through each component of the process, and the process as a whole, is partly related to how easy it is for parents to access information on CCEE and the length of time a parent has available to spend looking for care, among other factors.

The four example pathways also illustrate how much the process can vary from one family to another. While it is possible that a family may have a linear experience—first searching, then considering, then selecting—it is also possible that a family will work on several components simultaneously (for example, searching and considering at the same time) or may have to circle back to redo certain components.

Next, we provide more details on the activities that may occur in each of the three components of the framework and possible ways families may experience the process. The bolded statements in each section refer to key concepts in the framework. We support these bolded statements and bulleted items with evidence cited throughout this report.

SEARCH
Seek or receive information or advice about child care and early education

The term "search" describes the ways that parents navigate the process of seeking or receiving information or advice about CCEE. As described above, parents may start a CCEE search for many different reasons, and the reason for a search can shape the search experience itself (Betancur et al. 2025; Sandstrom et al. 2024). Searches may feel more urgent and rushed, or families may have more

time and capacity to search. Also, parents may look for different information depending on the reason they are searching.

Below are the main things that parents do when searching for information about CCEE; these correspond to the bolded headings in the framework's "Search" section (Exhibit 2).

Parents start with past experiences and prior knowledge

Some evidence suggests that parents typically start their CCEE search by relying on their **direct experience with CCEE** (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023). This may include information gained from using CCEE before for the same child or for a different child. It can also include parents recalling their own childhood experiences with CCEE (Betancur et al. 2025; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012).

Past research has found that a parent's past experiences with CCEE and prior knowledge about CCEE options sometimes lead them to select a CCEE provider without searching for other options (Betancur et al. 2025; NSECE Project Team 2014). In fact, in one nationally representative household survey, about 38 percent of households considered only one provider when they searched for care, and most reported using that provider previously or personally knowing them (NCECE Project Team 2014). An example of this is when a family with multiple children already using CCEE for one child prefers using the same provider for another child. In that case, the process may start with a parent's prior knowledge about the provider as a possible CCEE option ("Search"), using that knowledge and past experience to assess whether the provider is a good fit ("Consider"), and confirming availability for the new child and enrolling them with the same provider ("Select"). This straightforward search, consider, and select experience would fit within the first example shown in the visual in Exhibit 2.

Parents also learn about specific providers in their neighborhood and CCEE options in their broader community in various ways. Multiple studies have found that parents are **exposed to CCEE information and resources** displayed in the community (e.g., advertisement signs or fliers) and on social media—and also hear about CCEE options at community events (Betancur et al. 2025; Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; Lauderback et al. 2023; NSECE Project Team 2014; Sandstrom et al. 2022; Tang 2021).

Parents may also gain **knowledge of possible care options** based on previous experiences and personal interactions (Vesely 2013). In one study, some parents reported familiarity with CCEE programs they had previously walked or driven by or had overheard parents talking about on the playground or in other public spaces (Betancur et al. 2025). This prior knowledge and exposure may provide parents with a starting point for gathering information about CCEE options available nearby.

Though there is limited published research evidence on parents who seek relative care (other than a parent), we hypothesize that expectant parents and parents of young children may talk with grandparents or other trusted caregivers who express interest in providing care. These conversations may also give parents a sense of possible care options that they can turn to when they need CCEE for their children. Parents may prefer relative care from the start and not consider other options or may consider combining relative care with other CCEE providers in their search.

In addition, parents' own **personal values, beliefs, needs, and preferences** can also shape their CCEE search. These personal factors can influence both the information sources parents use and the specific information they look for as they search, according to some studies (Forry et al. 2013; Hirilall et al. 2024; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012; Sandstrom, Kuhns, et al. 2022; Shlay 2010). Parents' values, beliefs, needs, and preferences may also help them narrow CCEE options about the types of settings and care features they want. For example, parents may prefer home-based settings if they believe the smaller groups are safer or more beneficial for their children. Other parents may prefer a provider that is aligned with their beliefs and cultural practices (Brewsaugh et al. 2025). In short, there are many ways in which parents' needs and preferences may inform their search for CCEE.

Parents' perceptions also can shape when, how, and what information they search for. Although evidence is still limited, at least one study suggests parents form ideas about the cost or availability of care based on their previous experiences with CCEE and what they have heard about it. For example, parents living in areas known for long waiting lists and high prices for child care may begin searching earlier and more widely for care options (Sandstrom et al. 2022; Lauderback et al. 2023).

In sum, parents may have past experience with CCEE or exposure to resources and information on CCEE in their community that shapes how they go about their search. Personal values, beliefs, needs, and preferences often guide parents as they search for information and seek CCEE options. However, prior knowledge and experience varies, and some parents may be less familiar with CCEE. Yet limited research describes this variation and the experiences of parents with no prior knowledge or exposure.

Parents seek or receive information and opinions from different sources

As part of the search process, evidence from multiple studies suggests that parents often seek out or receive information and opinions from different people and places (Betancur et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025; Kabourek 2024; Sandstrom et al. 2024). For example, parents often draw on information from **people they know and trust, such as friends, relatives, and CCEE providers they already know** (Betancur et al. 2025; Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; Gordon et al. 2025; Kabourek 2024; NSECE Project Team 2014; Vesely 2013). Some studies show that parents may especially value recommendations of other parents who have had direct experiences with CCEE (Betancur et al. 2025; Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; NSECE Project Team 2014). Other trusted people who provide parents with information include neighbors and coworkers with children (Betancur et al. 2025; Moran 2021; Pacheco-Applegate et al. 2020; Vesely 2013), and service providers they know, such as pediatricians, social services caseworkers, home visitors, local school staff, librarians, and clergy (Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; Gordon et al. 2025; NSECE Project Team 2014; Tang 2021; Vesely 2013).

Emerging evidence from recent studies shows how parents communicate with individuals they know personally to find out about CCEE. Parents may actively seek information from these sources: for example, asking a neighbor which CCEE program they use. They may seek this information in a variety of ways, including in-person conversations, phone, text, email, or on social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp group chats (Betancur et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025). Parents may also get advice, recommendations, and personal referrals to specific CCEE providers without directly asking for or seeking it as a part of their search (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023;

Sandstrom et al. 2022). For example, a parent may hear about the child care program run by their church in conversation with other church members or they may have a close friend who talks about a child care provider that they like and use for their own children's care.

Recent studies also show that parents often get information from **sources or people they do not personally know, such as social media and parent groups** (Betancur et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025; Kabourek 2024)**.** These and other earlier studies found that many parents learn about CCEE through online web searches, social media, and other technology-based platforms (Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; Lauderback et al. 2023; NSECE Project Team 2014; Sandstrom et al. 2022; Tang 2021). It should be noted, however, that other data have shown that parents may not have a great deal of trust in these sources, even if they receive information from them (Gordon et al. 2025).

Emerging evidence shows that parents may also turn to **formal sources, such as child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), government agency offices, and government-sponsored websites and online search tools** (Betancur et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025). State and local government agencies provide information to families on applying for child care subsidies and publicly funded CCEE programs, such as Head Start and public prekindergarten. In addition, staff in local organizations, such as CCR&Rs, provide information to families seeking CCEE and can help parents more directly by providing referrals to local providers. Emerging evidence shows that formal online sources that parents sometimes use include official government websites such as childcare.gov, state quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) websites, child care licensing websites, and online child care search tools from state or local agencies (Gordon et al. 2025). Because many of these websites and search tools are quite new, little evidence is currently available on whether and how families use them when searching for child care.

In sum, a growing body of evidence shows that parents often gather information from people they know and trust, such as friends, relatives, and CCEE providers they already know. Multiple past studies have found that parents often search for information by browsing websites or social media platforms. Emerging evidence points out that parents may also seek information from formal governmental sources, but less evidence is available on how parents use these sources.

Parents look for a variety of information about CCEE

Page 14 of this report (Exhibit 2) lists the types of information that parents commonly report looking for, though parents may not look for information about all of these items. When searching for CCEE, many parents look for information about different kinds of services and care features (Sandstrom et al. 2024; Betancur et al. 2025; Kabourek 2024). For example, parents often look for information on cost, CCEE location and setting, the times a provider is open, the activities children engage in during the day, and other aspects of quality. Some recent evidence indicates that parents look for or prioritize different things during their search (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023; Sandstrom et al. 2022). For example, parents may want to send their child to a provider who speaks their language, offers services for children with developmental or behavioral needs, or has a facility with outside green space for children to play (Betancur et al. 2025).

Evidence from multiple studies shows that parents generally want information about child safety and other practical factors as well as certain qualities they may prefer in a care arrangement. Specifically, parents may search for information about whether the care setting:

- seems like a **safe care environment for the ages served** and meets parents' expectations for supervision (Ansari et al. 2020; Bassok et al. 2018; Forry et al. 2013; Gordon et al. 2025; Raikes et al. 2012; Rose et al. 2013; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012);

- is in a convenient **location,** close to home or parents' workplace (Ansari et al. 2020; Gordon et al. 2025; Forry et al. 2013; Rose, Vittrup, and Leveridge 2013; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012; U.S. Chamber of Commerce 2021; Vesely 2013);

- offers a **schedule** (for example, opening and closing hours) that aligns with the family's needs (Corcoran and Steinley 2019; Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; Gordon et al. 2025);

- has an affordable **cost** to parents given their budget and/or provides **financial support or accepts child care subsidies** (Gordon et al. 2025; Sandstrom et al. 2024; U.S. Chamber of Commerce 2021); and

- has **vacancies**—specifically, whether the provider is currently able to enroll the parent's child(ren) or when a spot will become available (Betancur et al. 2025).

Although less often mentioned in the literature than the characteristics just listed, some studies have shown that parents sometimes look for other CCEE characteristics, including:

- **type of setting**—for example, whether it is home-based, center-based, or school-based (Betancur et al. 2025; Wagner Robeson 2021; Smith and Owens 2023);

- use of **curriculum and activities** to support child development—for example, has clear plans for learning activities, reads to children, has areas of the learning space set up for different kinds of learning like building blocks, toy trains, books, etc. (Betancur et al. 2025; Sandstrom et al. 2022);

- the **quality** of the care setting—for example, whether the parent thinks the setting will support their child's education and developmental needs (Betancur et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025; Grogan 2012) or is included in their state's QRIS (Lauderback et al. 2023; Sandstrom et al. 2022);

- the **provider's training and experience**, such as their expertise in child development and years of experience working with children, and **staff qualifications and requirements**, such as staff education levels, background checks, and required health and safety trainings (Betancur et al. 2025; Moran 2021; Raikes et al. 2012; Rose et al. 2013; Rose et al. 2018);

- **licensing status**, such as whether the provider is licensed or regulated, meaning they are required to meet certain health and safety regulations (Forry et al. 2013; Raikes et al. 2012; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012); however, parents may look for care from a relative, friend, or neighbor whether or not that person is licensed or regulated (Betancur et al. 2025);

- how the CCEE setting respects and reflects the **family's culture**, such as displaying images of different traditions in the care environment, honoring cultural celebrations, and communicating

with parents about cultural values and beliefs most important to them (Betancur et al. 2025; Gordon et al 2025; Smith and Ehlers 2022);

- **languages spoken** in the care setting, for example, a provider who speaks the same language as the family (Betancur et al. 2025; Vesely 2013) or one that can support children's language development in English (Johnson et al. 2017; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012; Vesely 2021);

- **meals provided**, such as certain types of meals offered (for example, breakfast, lunch, dinner, and/or snack; hot meals and/or with fresh ingredients) or meals that are tailored for dietary needs, such as allergies or religious preferences (Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012); and

- **transportation—**for example, whether transportation is provided by the CCEE provider or available nearby on public transportation routes (Betancur et al. 2025; Grogan 2012).

In sum, a considerable body of evidence indicates that parents look for information about child safety and other practical factors as well as certain qualities they hope to find in a care arrangement. Evidence indicates that parents also look for other characteristics, such as type of care curriculum, activities, whether the provider speaks the same language as the family, and whether meals are provided, but these are less often searched for or held as priorities by parents.

Parents identify care options and contact providers for more information

Parents may also **contact providers to ask questions** or **schedule a visit** to get additional information (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023; Moran 2021). Emerging evidence suggests that these activities can be an important part of the search process as they give parents a chance to **meet providers in person and see the care environment** (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023). These same studies found that collecting additional information directly from providers helps parents address important questions, especially regarding vacancies and cost. Seeing the physical space, routines, and how adults interact with children in the care setting can help parents assess the care quality and get a feel for what their child's experience may be like (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023). Such visits can also be a way for parents to assess for themselves the safety and cleanliness of the space (Betancur et al. 2025).

Overall, evidence indicates that many parents seek information directly from providers, including calling and arranging visits to meet the providers and see the care environment. Yet, evidence about what happens when parents call or visit a provider and the information they gain is quite limited, indicating this area of literature may need additional evidence.

CONSIDER
Review & evaluate info gathered on child care and early education options

The conceptual framework shows that parents do not move straight from searching for a CCEE provider to selecting a CCEE provider. They first **review information gathered about available providers,** as shown by some recent evidence (Betancur et al. 2025; Datta et al. 2025; Gordon et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023). This evidence suggests that parents **evaluate and compare options**

based on affordability, parents' needs and preferences, and quality/supports for child development found during their search (Betancur et al. 2025; Sandstrom et al. 2024). Some evidence suggests that the options parents find during the search do not always align with all their needs and preferences (e.g., preferring a CCEE setting that provides hot meals, transportation, or other desired feature; or preferring to provide parent-care only) (Hirilall et al. 2024; Paschall et al. 2021; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012). This misalignment forces some parents to closely evaluate options and the information they have against their needs and preferences.

When considering their CCEE options, parents **assess if the information is sufficient to make a decision** to select a CCEE provider. According to a recent national survey, parents vary in whether they feel they have sufficient information on CCEE options, with 65 percent indicating they did have sufficient information and 35 percent indicating that they did not (Datta et al. 2025). We hypothesize that during the "Consider" component, parents review what they know about providers and determine if any provider meets their needs or if they would prefer to care for their child(ren) themselves. Recent studies have shown that some parents find only one provider that meets their families' needs during their search whereas other parents find multiple potential providers (Betancur et al. 2025; Datta et al. 2025). In some cases, parents may review what they know about providers and determine that a provider meets their needs and move to the "Select" component (as shown in example 1 in Exhibit 2). In other cases, they may return to the "Search" component to find more information about possible providers (as shown in examples 2 and 4 in Exhibit 2).

In the "Consider" component of the framework, parents may need to **revisit priorities and consider tradeoffs in light of the family's needs and circumstances** when thinking about their options and the CCEE setting that best meets their needs (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023; Wagner Robeson 2021). Certain CCEE options may not fulfill all of the features that the parents need or want, forcing them to consider what is most important to them (Lauderback et al. 2023). For example, care location and proximity may become a higher or lower priority, shaped by access to reliable transportation and commuting patterns (Hirilall et al. 2024). Evidence has shown that parents' preferences often shape what they look for in a provider; however, their options may be limited to what is available nearby as well as logistical factors like cost, location, and schedules (Forry et al. 2013; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012; Shlay 2010). Parents may have to "trade off" a preference for a necessary logistical factor. For example, a parent may find a provider who has an outdoor play space and prefer that provider to others they have found; however, the hours of this preferred provider may not align with the parent's work schedule, requiring the parent to choose a different child care option for their child. Parents may also reflect on other flexibility they may have when considering their CCEE options. For example, families may change work schedules to make care arrangements feasible (Gordon et al. 2025).

Similarly, parents often reprioritize when considering tradeoffs related to what they want or need from CCEE versus what is available. For example, one study found that some parents, based on the parents' preferences and available resources, might be willing to pay more or travel further to send their child to a provider that is higher quality (Betancur et al. 2025). Other families might give up something important to them, such as having a child care program that offers instruction in their home language, because this service was not available among the providers they were considering

(Betancur et al. 2025). These past studies suggest the compromises families make and how challenging they are may vary depending on families' options and resources.

We hypothesize that parents **continue searching if no options meet their families' needs and if resources allow.** In other words, they would start to "Search" again for more information or to find additional providers if they do not have a time-sensitive need for CCEE. Some data have shown that having access to a relative or friend who can provide care temporarily or a flexible employer that can accommodate parents' needs for more time to find a CCEE provider can give parents the ability to search longer and allow them the opportunity to find a provider that best fits their needs (Betancur et al. 2025). Thus, a parent may not move through the components of the framework in order, one by one, but could move back to the "Search" component of the process.

In some cases, parents may have enough information to select a provider but face waiting lists, which can cause them to continue searching or delay starting care until a spot opens up (Betancur et al. 2025; Lauderback et al. 2023; Sandstrom et al. 2022). Some limited evidence suggests that parents may need to continue using their current arrangement temporarily or rely on back-up caregivers until they can secure a spot and begin care with their selected provider (Betancur et al. 2025; Pilarz, Sandstrom and Henly 2022.). In light of this, we hypothesize that when families cannot immediately select the CCEE they decided was best for their family (e.g., a child is on a waiting list for a long time), the parents may need to restart the "Search" process or revisit other options ("Consider") in order to select a different provider (see examples 3 and 4 in Exhibit 2, which illustrate scenarios such as these). Parents may have to, at least temporarily, compromise on their needs and preferences while navigating the time it takes to enroll their children.

In sum, the emerging evidence from recent studies combined with past research highlights the importance of the "Consider" component of the framework. Multiple studies describe how parents review and assess the information gathered about available providers during their search before selecting a provider. Even in cases when parents have a provider in mind or find just one provider, they review what they know about their provider and compare this against their needs and preferences. In addition, parents often make tradeoffs across desired features of CCEE providers and may need to return to the "Search" component of the process to gather more information or find other options. Although existing evidence supports the "Consider" component, evidence is more limited on how parents weigh their options, the extent to which options meet their needs, and the impacts of the tradeoffs parents make.

SELECT
Make decision about child care and early education

The framework proposes that parents use the information they have to compare their CCEE options and select the care option that is the best fit for their family. The "Select" component is when parents make the decision about their child care. A parent may **select a new provider,** may **decide to stay** with their current provider, or may use **parental care only**. If they select a nonparental provider, it may be a **center- or home-based program**, or **relative, friend, nanny, or neighbor-provided care**. Some evidence shows that some parents may ultimately select only parent-provided care if the other options they considered do not meet their needs and preferences (Betancur et al 2025; Datta et al 2025). In other cases, parents may decide they prefer to care for their children themselves, even if they found CCEE options that met their needs (Betancur et al. 2025; Datta et al. 2025).

Sometimes families select a mix of options. Some data suggest that parents may need more than one provider to meet their child care needs and so they select multiple providers (Betancur et al. 2024; Pilarz 2018). For example, a family that needs care during both traditional hours (approximately 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday) and evening hours might decide to send their child to a center-based program during traditional hours and have a relative provide care in the evenings after the center has closed (Dow et al. 2023).

In sum, parents may select a new provider, or they may decide to stay with their current provider depending on whether the other options they considered meet their needs and preferences. Recent evidence also suggests that for some parents, choosing to stay at home and provide parent-only care to their child is an outcome of their search for CCEE (Bentancur et al. 2025; Datta et al. 2025). However, gaps in the research remain regarding whether selected providers meet families' needs. Less is known on the extent to which selecting a provider reflects parents' satisfaction or compromises. Also, more research is needed on how the characteristics of a CCEE search (e.g., reason for search; length of search; perceived ease) are related to how well the selected provider meets families' needs.

Exhibit 2. How Parents Search for, Consider, and Select Child Care and Early Education: A Conceptual Framework

SEARCH

Seek or receive information or advice about child care and early education

Start with past experience and prior exposure/knowledge
- Direct experience with child care and early education
- Exposure to child care information/resources
- Knowledge of possible care options
- Family needs, values, beliefs, and preferences

Seek/receive information and opinions from:
- People they know and trust such as friends, relatives, or providers
- Sources or people they do not personally know, such as social media and parent groups
- Formal sources, such as child care resource and referral agencies, government agency websites, or other agency websites and web-based apps

Look for information on child care and early education options, such as:
- Safety of care environment
- Location
- Provider schedule and scheduling flexibility
- Cost
- Financial assistance/subsidy participation
- Vacancies
- Type of setting
- Curriculum and activities
- Quality
- Staff training and background
- Licensing status
- Languages spoken
- Meals provided
- Transportation available

Identify possible care options and contact providers to:
- Ask additional questions
- Schedule a visit
- Meet provider and see care setting

CONSIDER

Review & evaluate info gathered on child care and early education options

- **Review information gathered** about available providers
- **Evaluate and compare** options based on affordability, parents' needs and preferences, and quality/supports for child development
- **Assess if information** is sufficient to make a decision
- **Revisit priorities** and consider tradeoffs in light of family's needs and circumstances
- **Continue searching** if no options meet families' needs and resources allow

SELECT

Make decision about child care and early education

Select a new provider
- Center- or home-based program
- Relative, friend, nanny, or neighbor-provided care
- Parent-provided care only

Decide to stay with:
- Existing center- or home-based program
- Existing relative, friend, nanny, or neighbor-provided care
- Parent-provided care only

Some factors can make it easier or harder to find information on child care and early education:
- Availability of consumer education information
- Relevant and timely resources and supports
- Connections to social networks

Some factors can make it easier or harder to find and select child care and early education:
- Local supply of quality child care and early education
- Child care cost
- Availability and ease of obtaining child care subsidies

The image below displays four examples of how parents may experience the process of searching for, considering, and selecting child care and early education. Every family's process is different, shaped by their circumstances and available information and supports.

| SEARCH	CONSIDER	SELECT
Seek or receive information or advice about child care and early education	Review & evaluate information gathered on child care and early education options	Make decision about child care and early education

Example 1 - Parents who move easily through the process
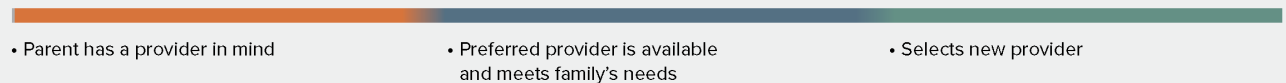
• Parent has a provider in mind

• Preferred provider is available and meets family's needs

• Selects new provider

Example 2 - Parents who search and consider multiple times before selecting
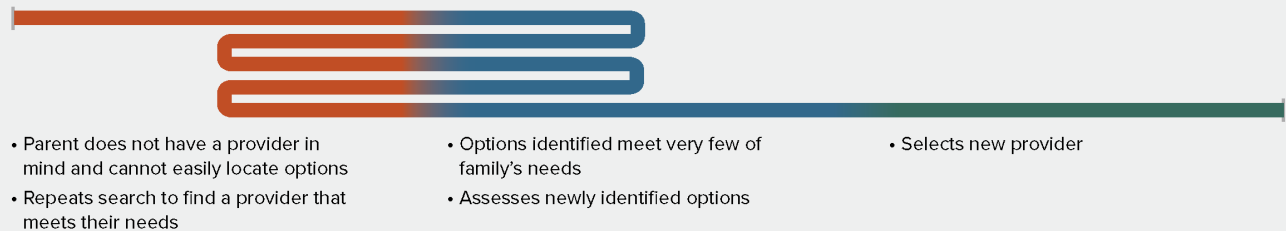
• Parent does not have a provider in mind and cannot easily locate options

• Repeats search to find a provider that meets their needs

• Options identified meet very few of family's needs

• Assesses newly identified options

• Selects new provider

Example 3 - Parents who consider and select multiple times
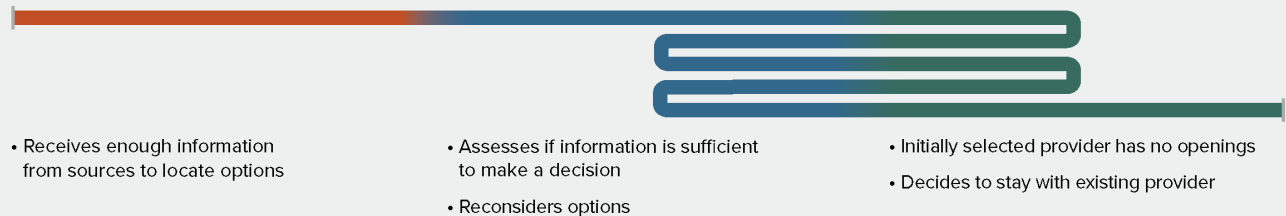
• Receives enough information from sources to locate options

• Assesses if information is sufficient to make a decision

• Reconsiders options

• Initially selected provider has no openings

• Decides to stay with existing provider

Example 4 - Parents who go through search, consider, and select multiple times
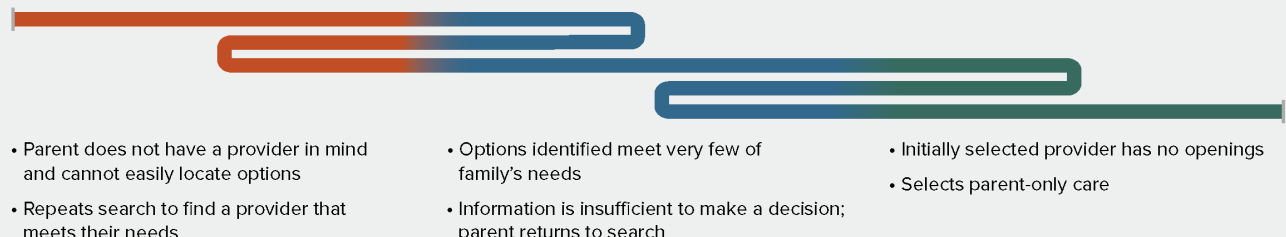
• Parent does not have a provider in mind and cannot easily locate options

• Repeats search to find a provider that meets their needs

• Options identified meet very few of family's needs

• Information is insufficient to make a decision; parent returns to search

• Initially selected provider has no openings

• Selects parent-only care

Factors that can shape parents' CCEE search, consideration, and selection

Factors often exist outside of the family's control that can make it easier or harder for parents to find information about, consider options, and select CCEE. These are listed at the bottom of the first page of Exhibit 2 and discussed in more detail below.

Factors that can make it easier or harder to find information on CCEE

Certain factors can affect a parent's ability to find information about CCEE, making the process easier or harder. Factors include the **availability of consumer education information** in their state and local community and their receipt of **relevant and timely resources and supports** (Sandstrom et al. 2024). When parents do not have easily accessible information as they search, identifying CCEE options that fit their family's needs may become more challenging. For example, they may consider only a small number of child care options, even if multiple child care providers exist in the community (Tang et al. 2024).

We hypothesize that when information is readily available and received in a timely way, parents' search experiences may be easier because they will have access to the information they need when they need it to help inform decisions. For example, parents whose communities provide a lot of marketing for consumer education websites may have access to more information about the resources available to them and may more easily find the information when needed. We also hypothesize, for example, that parents who live near a CCR&R that is active in the community may have more opportunities to find out about CCEE in their area. In addition, if parents attend community events where active CCR&Rs are present, they may gain valuable information about CCEE options in their community. This is in contrast to parents living in communities without those resources or who do not attend local events, who have fewer opportunities to gather similar information.

Some data suggest that **connections to social networks**—personal contacts and relationships, broadly speaking—can support parents' search for CCEE (Betancur et al. 2025). While no known empirical study has assessed whether parents with more social connections find information more easily, evidence from multiple studies suggests that many parents rely on social connections and the people they know when they are looking for CCEE, as described above under "Search" (Ansari et al. 2020; Betancur et al. 2025; Dodge-Ostendorf et al. 2019; Gordon et al. 2025; Moran 2021; NSECE Project Team 2014; Pacheco-Applegate et al. 2020; Vesely 2013; Vesely et al. 2021). Parents with fewer connections may have a harder time finding information. One study showed, for example, that parents who recently migrated to the United States (with no connections) did not know where to find information about CCEE or who to ask (Vesely et al. 2021).

In sum, although some evidence suggests parents with more personal connections and greater access to resources about CCEE may find information more easily, less evidence is available on the specific information sources that make parents' searches easier and why, suggesting areas for future research.

Factors that can make it easier or harder to find and select CCEE

Many factors can make parents' process for selecting CCEE easier or more challenging. We hypothesize that certain factors that shape how parents search for and select care can include the **local supply of quality CCEE, child care cost,** and the **availability and ease of obtaining child care subsidies.**

CCEE supply is more limited for some families, such as those with infants and toddlers, those with children with disabilities, and those needing care during nontraditional hours (Betancur et al. 2025; Freeman 2024; Henly and Adams 2018). For example, some data indicate that parents working nontraditional hours may have trouble finding CCEE available during those hours, depending on where they live and their personal networks (Sandstrom et al. 2012; Schilder et al. 2022; Scott and Abelson 2016; Sloane et al. 2019). In addition, the potentially high cost of CCEE can be a major barrier for parents without adequate financial resources or financial assistance—as suggested by multiple studies (Betancur et al. 2025; Datta et al. 2025; Sandstrom et al. 2024; U.S. Department of Education 2018).

In sum, considerable evidence indicates that local CCEE supply and cost can limit or increase the number of parents' options for CCEE that meet their needs and the needs of their children (Coley et al. 2014; Norton et al. 2019; Sandstrom et al. 2024; Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012; Tang et al. 2024; Smith and Ehlers 2022; Trust for Learning 2018; U.S. Department of Education 2018).

Conclusion

This report describes a conceptual framework that proposes a model for how parents search for, consider, and select CCEE. Specifically, we explore why and how parents search for CCEE, the sources of information they use, the types of information they seek, and the actions they take when considering options and selecting a CCEE provider. We also describe how parents' past experiences and contextual factors, such as local CCEE supply, can make their experiences finding a CCEE arrangement easier or harder. We further illustrate this conceptual framework through example experiences depicted in Exhibit 2. In this framework, we go beyond previous work on this topic by:

- describing "Consider" as an additional component in the process of searching for, considering, and selecting child care. This shows that parents take time to think about and weigh their options and that merely finding information is not enough for parents to be able to make a selection about what option will best meet their needs;

- highlighting that there are differences in information that comes from informal sources such as friends, family, or other social connections. What many people have previously called "word of mouth" has multiple dimensions, with some sources more trusted by parents than others; and

- clarifying that components of the process are not linear but can happen at the same time or be repeated.

The conceptual framework can be used by state agency administrators and staff, the technical assistance providers that work with them, local organizations, and policymakers as they consider

changes to policies and practices designed to help parents meet their child care information needs. It also helps these groups consider how the systems of consumer education could be refined to better support those needs as families engage in the process of searching for, considering, and selecting care. Specifically, the conceptual framework and the research supporting the framework might inform consumer education efforts by:

- informing how they assess how well the information, resources, and supports they offer address the three parts of the process: "Search," "Consider," and "Select." For example, states could consider the information about the different components of the process as they design and refine consumer education strategies, better reflecting the realities of how parents look for CCEE;

- providing insights into when and where parents of children of different ages, expectant parents, or community newcomers may benefit from seeing and hearing information to inform the CCEE options they consider; and

- supporting the identification of questions to ask parents to improve consumer education services.

The conceptual framework can also be used by researchers and others studying how parents search for, consider options, and select CCEE. This framework helps us to more holistically understand the needs of families related to information about CCEE. Previous literature has focused heavily on how parents select CCEE (Sandstrom et al. 2024), with less attention to when, where, and how parents search for information or how they consider available information and options. By depicting how parents with a range of needs search for, consider, and select CCEE, and highlighting supporting evidence (or lack thereof) related to these concepts, the framework identifies opportunities for researchers to add to the evidence base. Areas ripe for new research include:

- examining each component of the process (search, consider, and select) more deeply. This includes when and how parental experiences of those components vary;

- learning more about the circumstances that cause parents to loop back through components of the process; and

- developing more actionable information for those providing consumer education services on how to adjust services to better meet the needs of families. This includes a better understanding of the factors that make the process of searching for, considering, and selecting CCEE easier or harder.

To date, both qualitative and quantitative research has identified different ways that parents experience the CCEE "Search," "Consider," and "Select" process depending on many factors, including their prior exposure to and needs for CCEE. Knowing more about how and where parents look for information, how they use that information, and whether they are able to select CCEE that meets their needs may provide guidance about how to support parents looking for CCEE.

In this report, we have begun to provide details on the "Search," "Consider," and "Select" process and document some of the twists and turns parents may take when trying to find a care provider. However, little is known about how the characteristics of a CCEE search (e.g., reason; length; number and type of information sources used; perceived ease) are related to how well the selected provider meets families' needs. We recognize that more direct pathways to finding care impose less burden on

parents than pathways that repeat the same component multiple times, but gaps in the research remain about how this process may be connected to parents' satisfaction with their decisions and whether the selected provider meets families' needs.

Finally, the framework can help researchers build evidence on the extent to which parents' needs are not being met. Needs may not be met because of a lack of available information and consumer education services or by the available CCEE supply or both. Research on how agencies' consumer education resources and services work in combination with other sources of information that parents use to find CCEE could help improve consumer education and allow agencies to more efficiently use their resources.

This report is part of the *Consumer Education and Parental Choice in Early Care and Education* (CEPC) project. The primary goals of the project were to learn about how parents find and use information to make informed choices about their children's enrollment in CCEE and to learn about the states' and territories' consumer education efforts. Several studies were done as part of this project, including a household survey of families, focus groups with parents with children under age 6, a literature review, and a secondary data analysis of national survey data. This conceptual framework was informed by research literature in the field, along with results of the CEPC project studies.

References

Ansari, Arya, Lilla K. Pivnick, Elizabeth T. Gershoff, Robert Crosnoe, and Diana Orozco Lapray. 2020. "What Do Parents Want from Preschool? Perspectives of Low-Income Latino/a Immigrant Families." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 52:38–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.08.007

Bassok, Daphna, Preston Magouirk, Anna J. Markowitz, and Daniel Player. 2018. "Are There Differences in Parents' Preferences and Search Processes across Preschool Types? Evidence from Louisiana." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 44:43–54.

Betancur, Laura, Ji-Young Choi, and Heather Rouse. 2024. "Prevalence and Predictors of Multiple, Concurrent Public Early Childhood Education Utilization among Head Start Children." *Children and Youth Services Review* 163 (107788). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107788

Betancur, Laura, Laura Jimenez Parra, and Heather Sandstrom. 2025 "How Parents Search for and Select Child Care: A Qualitative Study." OPRE Report #2025-025, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Brewsaugh, Katrina, Anna Fleming, and Heather Sandstrom. 2025 "Developing Child Care Resources to Reach Tribal Communities." OPRE Report #2025-022, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Coley, Rebekah Levine, Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, Melissa A. Collins, and Portia Miller. 2014. "Selection into Early Education and Care Settings: Differences by Developmental Period." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 29(3):319–32.

Corcoran, Lisa, and Katrina Steinley. 2019. "Early Childhood Program Participation, Results from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Costanzo, Molly A., and Katherine Magnuson. 2019. "How Does Disability Influence Child Care Arrangements for Young Children? An Examination Using the NHES ECPP." *Children and Youth Services Review* 99: 210–25.

Crosnoe, Robert, Kate Chambers Prickett, Chelsea Smith, and Shannon Cavanagh. 2014. "Changes in Young Children's Family Structures and Child Care Arrangements." *Demography* 51(2):459–83.

Datta, A. Rupa, et al. 2025. "Connecting Parents' Child Care Decisions with their Needs, Information Access, and Perceived Child Care Options." OPRE Report #2025-140, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Davis, Elizabeth E., Caroline S. Carlin, Caroline Krafft, and Kathryn Tout. 2014. "Time for a Change? Predictors of Child Care Changes by Low-income Families." *Journal of Children and Poverty* 20(1):21–45.

Dodge-Ostendorf, April, Fitzgerald Draper, and Kim Engelman. 2019. "Family Voices Driving Quality Child Care Choices." Child Care Aware of America.

Dow, Dawn, Diane Schilder, Cary Lou, Eve Mefferd, Peter Willenborg, Justin B. Doromal, Jonah Norwitt, and Laura Wagner. 2023. "Nontraditional-Hour Child Care in Austin/Travis County. Insights from Interviews, Focus Groups, and Analyses of Supply and Demand." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/executive-summary-nontraditional-hour-child-care-austin-travis-county-insights

Forry, Nicole D., Shana Simkin, Edyth J. Wheeler, and Allison Bock. 2013. "'You Know How It Makes You Feel': Low-income Parents' Childcare Priorities and Definitions of Ideal High-quality Childcare." *Journal of Children and Poverty* 19(2):107–26.

Freeman, Amanda. 2024. "Impossible Arrangements: The Extreme Challenge of Child Care for Low-income Mothers." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 00:1-19. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12562

Gordon, Molly, et al. 2025. "How Parents Use Information to Search, Consider and Select Child Care and Early Education: Highlights from National Survey Data." OPRE Report #2025-099, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Grogan, K. E. 2012. "Parents' Choice of Pre-kindergarten: The Interaction of Parent, Child and Contextual Factors." *Early Child Development and Care* 182(10):1265–87.

Henly, Julia, and Gina Adams. 2018. "Insights on Access to Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/insights-access-quality-child-care-infants-and-toddlers

Hirilall, Ashley, Holly Keaton, Elizabeth Davis, Kathryn Tout, Jennifer Cleveland, Mallory Warner, and Elizabeth Villegas. 2024. "Understanding Minnesota Families' Access to Child Care Choices That Align With Their Priorities and Preferences." Child Trends. https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/1980/09/MisalignIndex_ChildTrends_Sept2024.pdf

Johnson, Anna D., Christina Padilla, and Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal. 2017. "Predictors of Public Early Care and Education Use among Children of Low-income Immigrants." *Children and Youth Services Review* 73:24–36.

Kabourek, Sarah. 2024. "Exploring Child Care and Early Education 'Search Types': Evidence from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education." OPRE Report #2024-108. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/CEPC_NSECE-Search-Types-Brief_FINAL_508_08.09.24_toOPRE.pdf

Lauderback, Eleanor, Soumita Bose, Heather Sandstrom, Catherine Kuhns, and Eve Mefferd. 2023. "Parents' Reflections on Searching for Child Care during the Pandemic: Findings from Parent Focus Groups in the District of Columbia." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/parents-reflections-searching-child-care-during-pandemic

Malik, Rasheed, Katie Hamm, Leila Schochet, Cristina Novoa, Simon Workman, and Steven Jessen-Howard. 2018. "America's Child Care Deserts in 2018." Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/AmericasChildCareDeserts20182.pdf

Moran, Kaitlin K. 2021. "Perspectives on the Child Care Search Process in Low-income, Urban Neighborhoods in the United States." *Early Child Development and Care*: 1–15

National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. 2014. "Household Search for and Perceptions of Early Care and Education: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)." OPRE Report No. 2014-55a. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Norton, Maggie, Jen Bump, Jessica Tercha, Lauren Robertson, and Catherine Gardey. 2019. "Closing the Gap: How CCR&Rs Can Help Communities Meet Their Child Care Supply and Demand Needs." Child Care Aware of America. https://info.childcareaware.org/report-closing-the-gap

Office of Child Care. "Creating a Family-friendly Child Care Assistance Application." The Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

Pacheco-Applegate, Aida, Erin Devorah Carreon, Emily Ellis, Whitney Clarke Thomas, Julia R. Henly, Julie Spielberger, and Marci Ybarra. 2020. "Finding Child Care in Two Chicago Communities: The Voices of Latina Mothers." Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration.

Paschall, Katherine, Elizabeth E. Davis, and Kathryn Tout. 2021. "Measuring and Comparing Multiple Dimensions of Early Care and Education Access." OPRE Report #2021-08. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Pilarz, Alejandra Ros. 2018. "Multiple Child Care Arrangements and School Readiness in Kindergarten." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 42(1):170–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.09.004

Pilarz, Alejandra Ros, Heather Sandstrom, and Julia R. Henly. 2022. "Making Sense of Childcare Instability Among Families with Low Incomes: (Un)desired and (Un)planned Reasons for Changing Childcare Arrangements." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8 (5): 120–42. https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022.8.5.06

Raikes, Helen, Julia Torquati, Cixin Wang, and Brinn Shjegstad. 2012. "Parent Experiences with State Child Care Subsidy Systems and Their Perceptions of Choice and Quality in Care Selected." *Early Education & Development* 23(4):558–82.

Rose, Katherine K., Amy Johnson, Joel Muro, and Rhonda R. Buckley. 2018. "Decision Making about Nonparental Child Care by Fathers: What Is Important to Fathers in a Nonparental Child Care Program." *Journal of Family Issues* 39(2):299–327.

Rose, Katherine Kensinger, Brigitte Vittrup, and Tinney Leveridge. 2013. "Parental Decision Making About Technology and Quality in Child Care Programs." *Child & Youth Care Forum* 42 (5):475–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-013-9214-1

Sandstrom, Heather, and Ajay Chaudry. 2012. "'You Have to Choose Your Childcare to Fit Your Work': Childcare Decision-Making among Low-Income Working Families." *Journal of Children and Poverty* 18(2):89–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2012.710480

Sandstrom, Heather, Lindsay Giesen, and Ajay Chaudry. 2012. "How Contextual Constraints Affect Low-Income Working Parents' Child Care Choices." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Sandstrom, Heather, Catherine Kuhns, Michelle Casas, Eleanor Lauderback, Soumita Bose, Fernando Hernandez-Lepe, and Erica Greenberg. 2022. "What Were Parents' Experiences Searching for Child Care in the Wake of the Pandemic? Findings from a Survey of Parents in the District of Columbia." Washington, DC: Urban

Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/what-were-parents-experiences-searching-child-care-wake-pandemic

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.

Schilder, Diane, Gina Adams, Laura Wagner, Cary Lou, and Peter Willenborg. 2022. "What Child Care Arrangements Do Parents Want during Nontraditional Hours?" Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/what-child-care-arrangements-do-parents-want-during-nontraditional-hours

Scott, Ellen K., and Miriam J. Abelson. 2016. "Understanding the Relationship Between Instability in Child Care and Instability in Employment for Families with Subsidized Care." *Journal of Family Issues* 37(3):344–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13516763

Shlay, Ann B. 2010. "African American, White and Hispanic Child Care Preferences: A Factorial Survey Analysis of Welfare Leavers by Race and Ethnicity." *Social Science Research* 29:125–41.

Sloane, Kelly, Jason Fontana, Anna Shaw-Amoah, David Lapp, and Alyn Turner. 2019. "Making It Work: Examining the Status of Non-Traditional Child Care in Pennsylvania." Research for Action.

Smith, Linda, and Coles Ehlers. 2022. "Findings from BPC's Survey of American Indian/Alaska Native Parents." Bipartisan Policy Center. https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/findings-from-bpcs-survey-of-american-indian-alaska-native-parents/

Smith, Linda, and Victoria Owens. 2023. "The Illusion of Parent Choice: Lessons Learned from BPC's Parent Survey Series." Bipartisan Policy Center. https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/BPC_ECI-Parent-Report_R04.pdf

Speirs, Katherine E., Colleen K. Vesely, and Kevin Roy. 2015. "Is Stability Always a Good Thing? Low-income Mothers' Experiences with Child Care Transitions." *Children and Youth Services Review* 53:147–156.

Tang, Jing. 2021. "Examining Parental Child Care Decision-Making: A Mixed Methods Study of Parental Search Strategies." Unpublished dissertation, University of Delaware.

Tang, Jing, Rena Hallam, and Jessica Francis. 2024. "Exploring Parents' Child Care Search and Decision-making Processes." *Children and Youth Services Review* 157:107437.

Trust for Learning. 2018. "Parents as Consumers of Early Childhood Education: Research Findings 2017." Trust for Learning. https://marylandfamiliesengage.org/parents-as-consumers-of-early-childhood-education-research-findings-2017/

U.S. Chamber of Commerce. 2021. "Untapped Potential: Economic Impact of Childcare Breakdowns in the U.S." U.S. Chamber of Commerce. https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/solutions/early-childhood-and-k-12-education/untapped-potential

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2018. "Early Childhood Care Arrangements: Choices and Costs." The Condition of Education 2018. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_tca.pdf

Vesely, Colleen K. 2013. "Low-income African and Latina Immigrant Mothers' Selection of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Considering the Complexity of Cultural and Structural Influences." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 28(3):470–86.

Vesely, Colleen K., Elizabeth K. DeMulder, Amber B. Sansbury, Elizabeth F. Davis, Bethany L. Letiecq, Isabella Willard, Rachael D. Goodman, and Amigas de la Comunidad. 2021. "'A Place Where My Children Could Learn to Read, Write, and Play': The Search for Early Care and Education among Undocumented Central American Immigrant Mothers." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 56(3):306–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.03.016

Wagner Robeson, Wendy. 2021. "Accessing Child Care During the Coronavirus Pandemic in Massachusetts." Wellesley Centers for Women. https://www.wcwonline.org/Fact-Sheets-Briefs/accessing-child-care-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-in-massachusetts

Watts, Katie, Grace Howarth, Alisa Ghazvini, and Cassandra Riedy Rush. 2021. "Child Care Decision Making During the COVID-19 Pandemic." WRMA. https://wrma.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Child_Care_White_Paper_ADA.pdf

Wilensky, Rachel, Alejandra Londono Gomez, Alyssa Fortner, and Tiffany Ferrete. 2023. "Expanding Access to Child Care Assistance. Opportunities in the Child Care and Development Fund." The Center for Law and Public Policy. https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/9.3.2024_Expanding-Access-to-Child-Care-Assistance.pdf

CEPC Project Team Contributing Authors:

Laura Betancur	Molly Gordon	Diane Schilder
Jill Connelly	Sarah Kabourek	Clare Waterman
A. Rupa Datta	Elly Miles	Bobbie Weber
Teresa Derrick-Mills	Heather Sandstrom	

Subscribe to OPRE News and Follow OPRE on Social Media