



# Boston Foundation Early Childhood Survey

December 2017

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## Summary

The Boston Foundation partnered with the Family Independence Initiative (FII) to design and distribute a survey to FII families in Boston to learn about how families experience child care, and what ideas they have to improve child care options and quality for themselves and their communities. The survey was designed in October and sent to FII families in November of 2017. We received 146 survey responses. The survey responses were augmented by FII's wider data set, providing further context to the

responses families supplied. FII families submit monthly journals to FII covering a wide range of indicators across financials, health, education, and social capital exchanges.

This report is split into three sections:

- **Summary** - Key learnings from the survey, demographics, and methods.
- **Analysis** - Evidentiary support for the key findings and more detailed analysis.
- **Survey** - Survey items sent to families.

## Key Findings

The following are key findings from our analysis of the survey data.

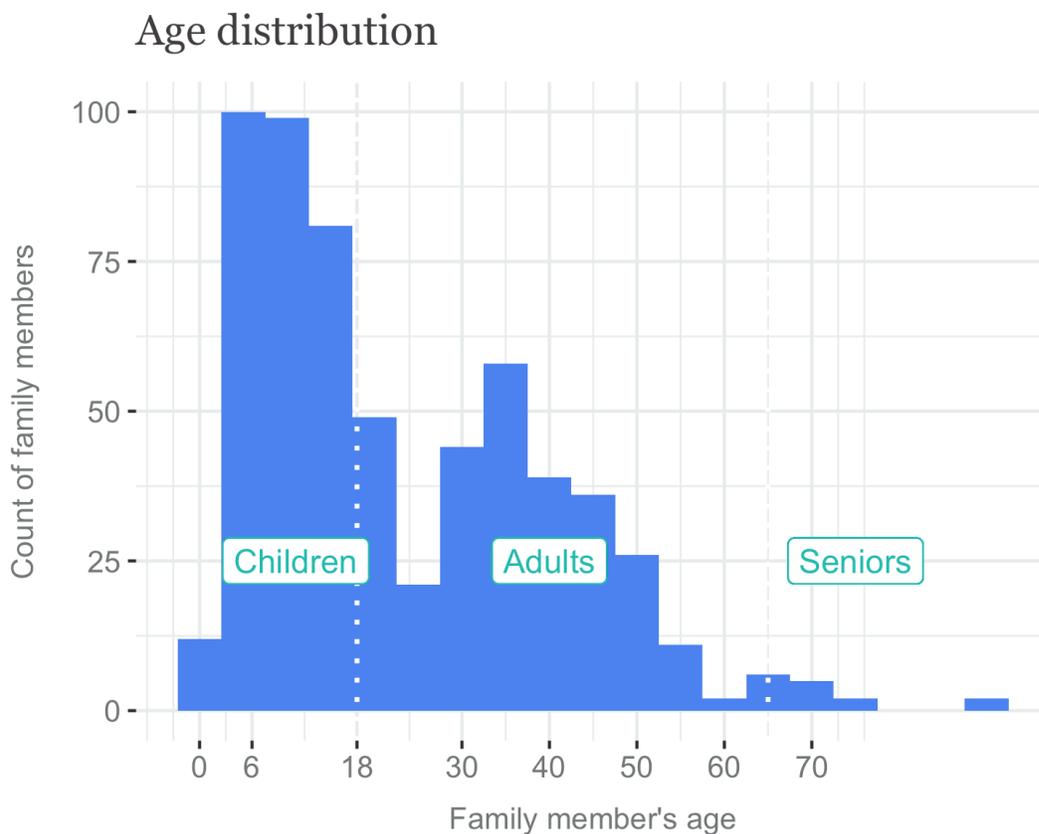
- **Families trust friends and family for child care advice, professionals for education advice** - Respondents turned to their friends and family for advice about child care, and turned to professionals and research for advice about their children's learning and education.
- **Families rarely turn to physicians for advice about their children** - Few families mentioned physicians as primary or secondary sources of information for advice about caring for their children or educating their children.
- **Higher income-families are more satisfied with child care options** - Relatively higher-income families were more satisfied with their child care than relatively lower-income families.
- **Lower income families get more child care help through networks** - Relatively lower-income families received more help with child care from their social networks, perhaps compensating for their otherwise reported lower level of satisfaction with child care options.
- **Financial resources would be most helpful to families** - When asked what resources they needed as a parent, more respondents mentioned financial resources more than any other type of resource, followed by educational resources and recreational programs for their children.

## Demographics

Survey responses were submitted by 146 families. This section illustrates the demographic characteristics of survey respondents to better contextualize the key findings and analysis available throughout this report. Given the high response rate, the demographic characteristics of the survey sample are representative of the broader demographic characteristics of FII families in the Boston area.

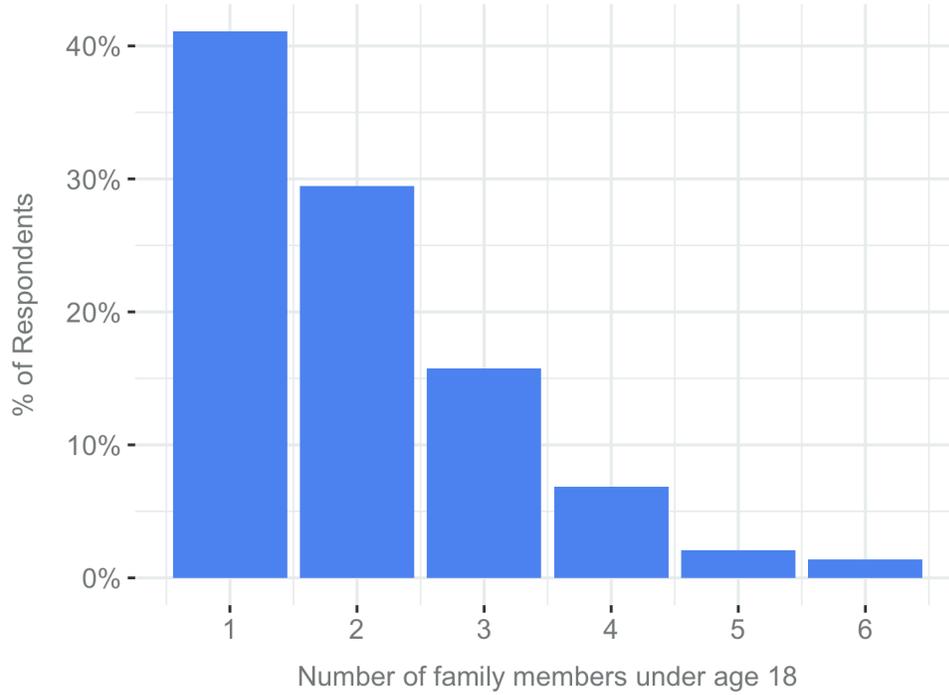
### Age

All of the respondents had one or more children (under 18) and one or more adults in the household. 42% of respondents currently have children under the age of 6. The following histogram shows the age distribution of family members for families that responded to the survey.



More than half of households have two or more children, with a modal number of children of one at just over 40% of households.

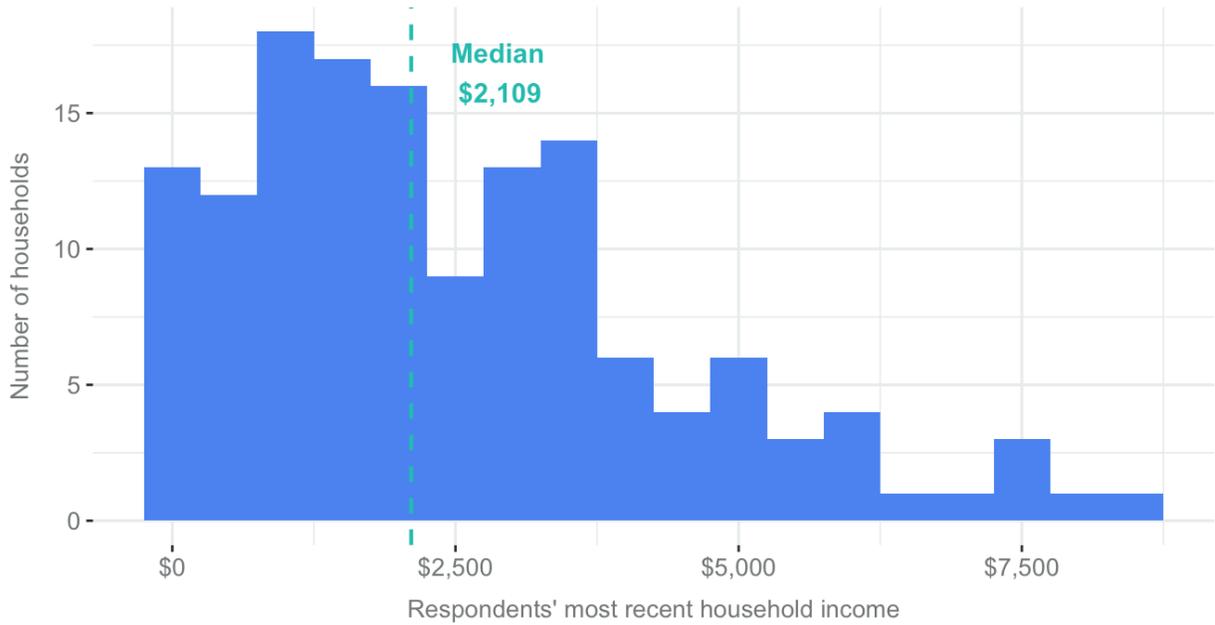
## Number of children under 18 per household



## Income

Survey respondents reported average monthly incomes around 32% of Boston's area median income. The following chart shows the distribution of respondents' monthly incomes at the time they submitted surveys as well as the median monthly income.

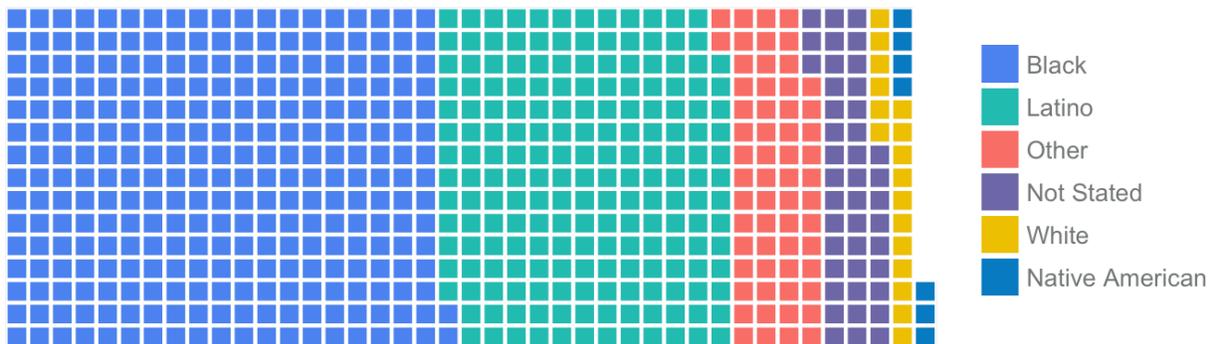
### Distribution of most recent household monthly income



### Race and Ethnicity

The majority of family members in households that submitted surveys identified as Black (48%) or Latino (32%). Because households can be mixed race, the following chart illustrates the proportion of *individuals* across all families that responded by race and ethnicity group they identify with.

### Distribution of race & ethnicity of family members



## Methodology

The survey items were designed jointly by staff at the Boston Foundation and the Family Independence Initiative. Once the survey items were completed, FII entered the survey questions into an online survey system capable of receiving responses online from users using either desktop or mobile web browsers. As just less than half of FII families identify as Latino or Hispanic, the survey was made available in both English and Spanish.

The survey was sent to families partnering with the Family Independence Initiative (FFI) that met the following conditions:

- Live in or around Boston
- Have a current email on file
- Have one or more children currently under the age of 18
- Actively participating in FII (submitting one or more journal entries or participating on uptogether.org in the last three months as of November 1, 2017)

242 families met the above criteria, and each was sent a survey in their language of preference on file (English or Spanish) via email. Of the 242 families surveys were sent to, 146 responded (60% response rate). Each family that submitted a survey was compensated \$50.

The email notifying families about the survey was sent on November 09, 2017. FII continued to receive survey responses until November 23, 2017.

110 of the surveys were completed in English, and 36 were completed in Spanish.

Survey items consisted of both multiple choice as well as open ended questions. In order to analyze the open ended questions, we used a technique called topic modeling to categorize text responses into categories. Once textual answers were categorized we were able to analyze those responses just like the multiple choice options.

## **Analysis**

This section is divided into multiple subsections organized by either types of questions asked in the survey or areas of analytical interest. Each subsection provides a detailed exploration of one or more survey questions, augmenting the survey responses with wider FII data where appropriate. The analysis in this section and subsections substantiates the key findings surfaced in the summary section earlier in this report.

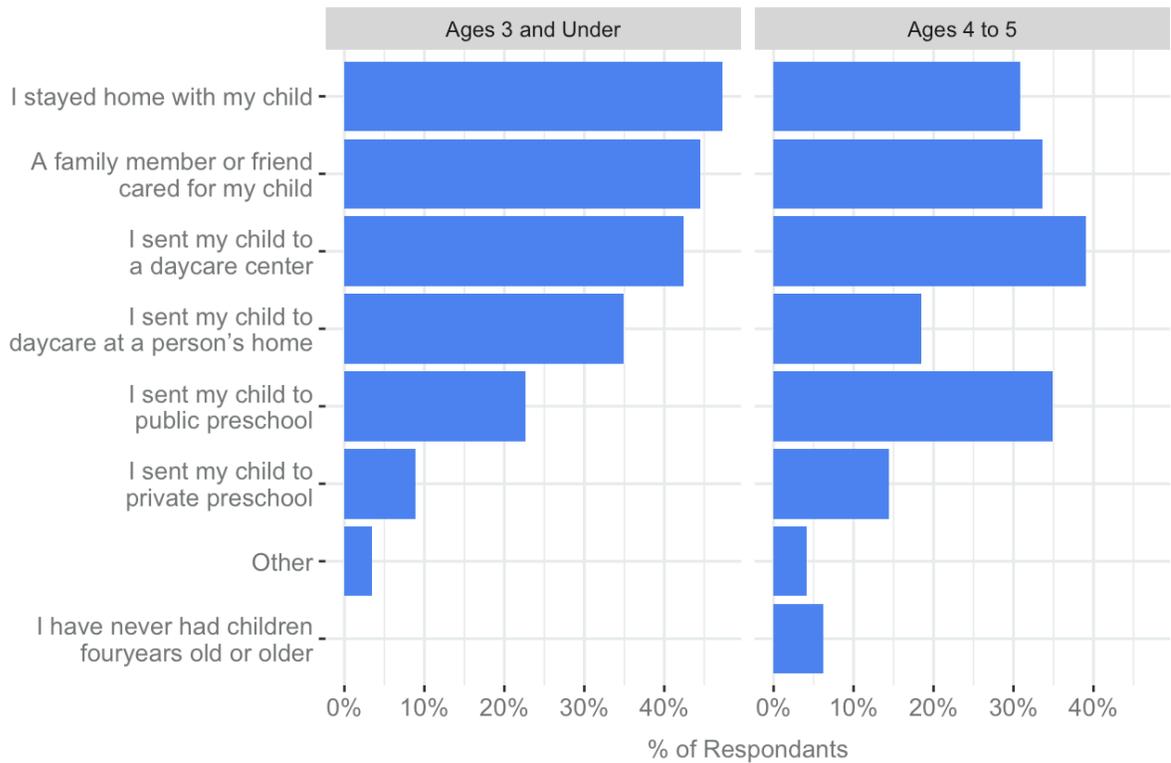
### **Child Care Arrangements**

Respondents were about their child care arrangements, such as their satisfaction with child care, proximity to care, etc. In this section we explore how families feel about and navigate child care for their children.

#### **Families utilized a variety of child care arrangements**

Almost half of families stayed at home with their child at some point, and many families had a family member or friend care for their child. Daycare services, either at a center or a person's home were popular as well. We can also see that daycare centers and public preschool were more common for ages 4-5 than for ages 3 and under.

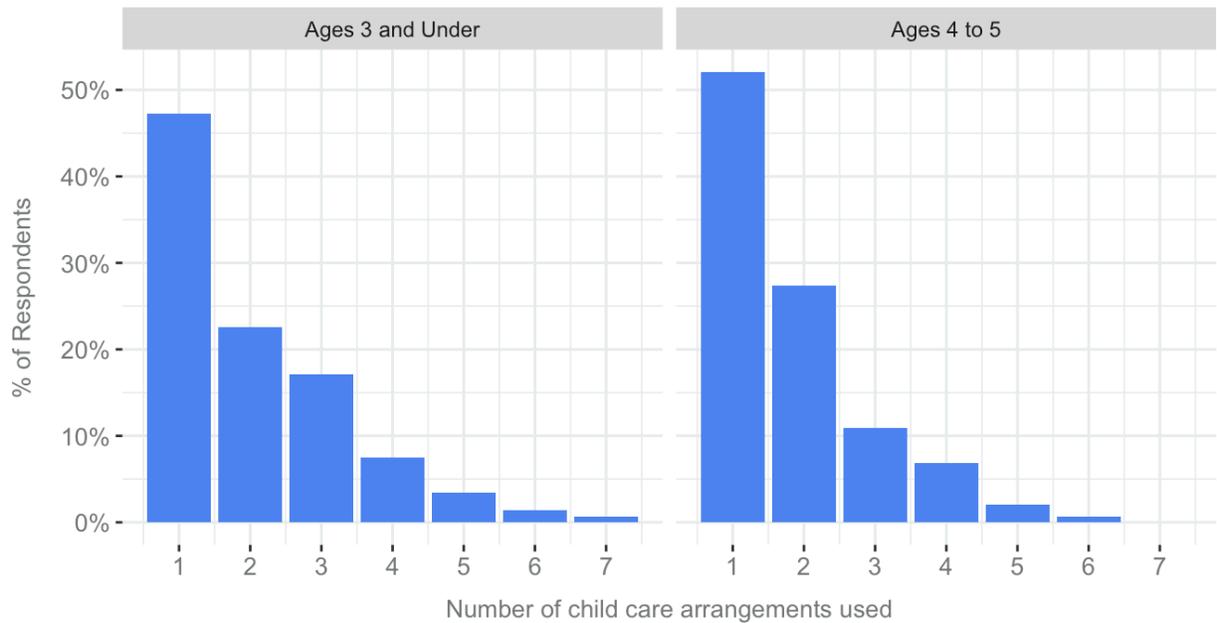
Select all the child care arrangements you currently use or have used in the past for your children



**Many families used more than one type of child care**

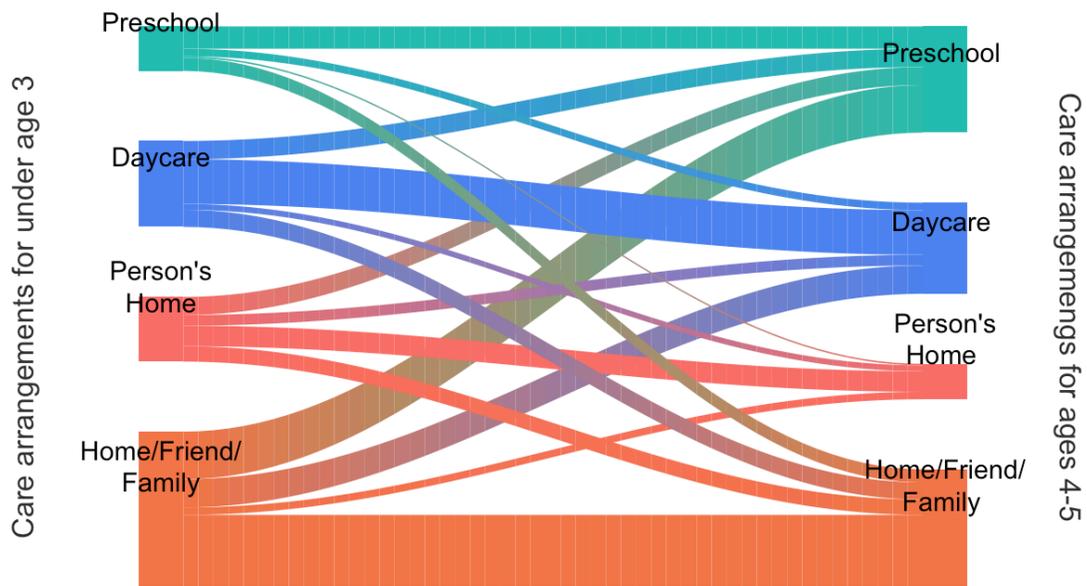
Survey respondents were able to mark more than one child care arrangement that they've used, and about half of families indicated that they used more than one.

## About half of families use more than one type of child care



The following chart, called a Sankey diagram, shows the overlap between families' responses about child care arrangements for ages 3 and under and then for ages 4 and 5. Where you can see a line going straight across the diagram indicates that a family used the same type of care across these age groups. In general we can see families utilize a variety of types of care as their children grow up.

## Many parents use the same types of care as their children grow



Other than daycare in a person's home, many parents appeared to continue to use the same type of child care as their children get older. The biggest change appears to be from care at home or with a family member or friend to preschool, and to a lesser degree daycare. This makes sense because many preschool programs are not available to younger children.

We also see that many parents continued to care for their children themselves or to used family or friends for child care. Survey respondents were able to mark more than one type of child care that they use, so it may be that parents were sending their children to preschool in addition to continuing to stay at home with them, or using friends or family for care. The next section will explore how families use more than one type of child care at a time.

## **Parents who stayed home with their children were more likely to also utilize other forms of child care**

While there is much crossover between these types of care across the two age groups, there are also some patterns if we look at the combination of care arrangements that parents use within each age group. The chart below indicates the correlation between different child care arrangements. A positive value means families marked these options together more frequently, and a negative value means families were less likely to indicate that they used both child care options.

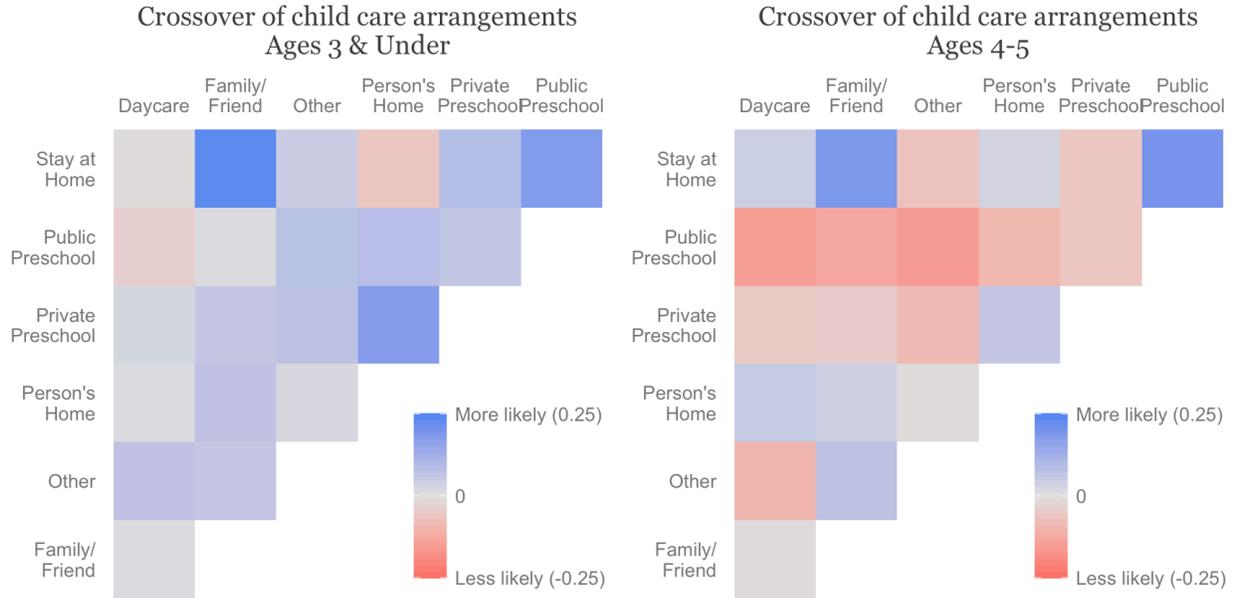
Correlation runs from -1 to 1, with 0 meaning there is no relationship between this pair, 1 would mean every time a parent mentioned Child Care Arrangement A they also mentioned Child Care Arrangement B, and -1 would mean any parent who mentioned Child Care Arrangement B never mentioned A. The correlation values below do not indicate very strong relationships between the different child care options -- the maximum is about 0.25 -- but this does show us some connections between the various arrangements.

For kids ages 3 and under:

- Families that stayed at home with their child were also likely to have their child stay with a friend or family member, and with less frequency, send their child to a public preschool.
- Families that send their child to a private preschool were more likely to also use daycare in a person's home.
- Families using a daycare center were less likely to use other forms of care.

For kids ages 4 and 5:

- Similar to care for younger kids, families that cared for their child at home were more likely to also use a friend or family member or public preschool for child care.
- Other than taking care of their child at home, families that used a public preschool used other child care options less frequently.

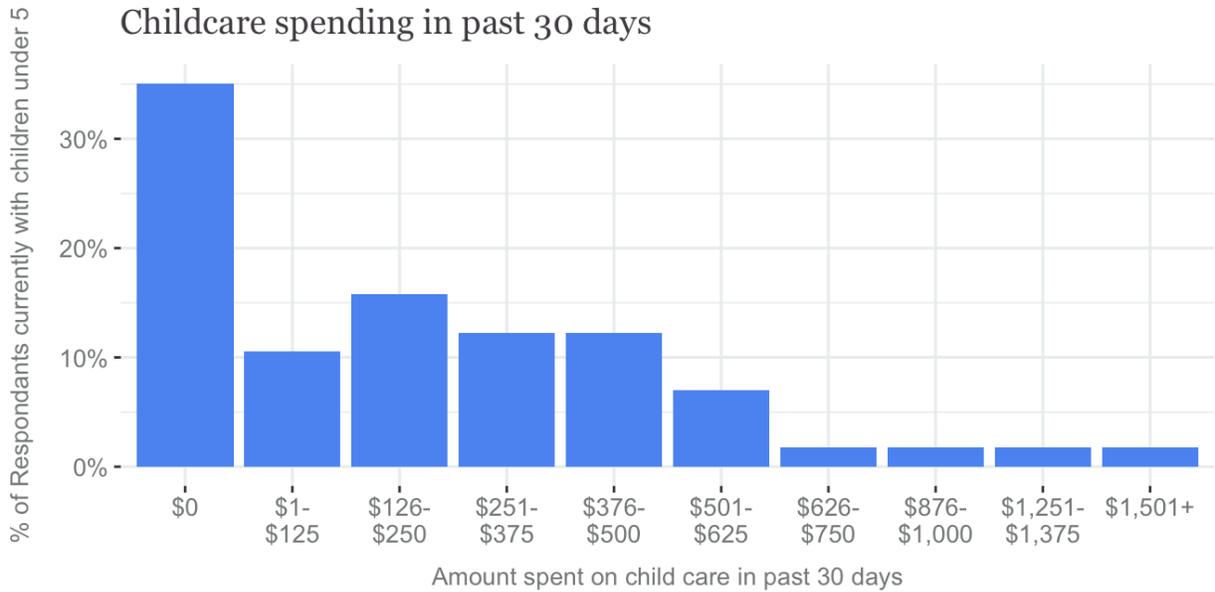


## Child Care Costs

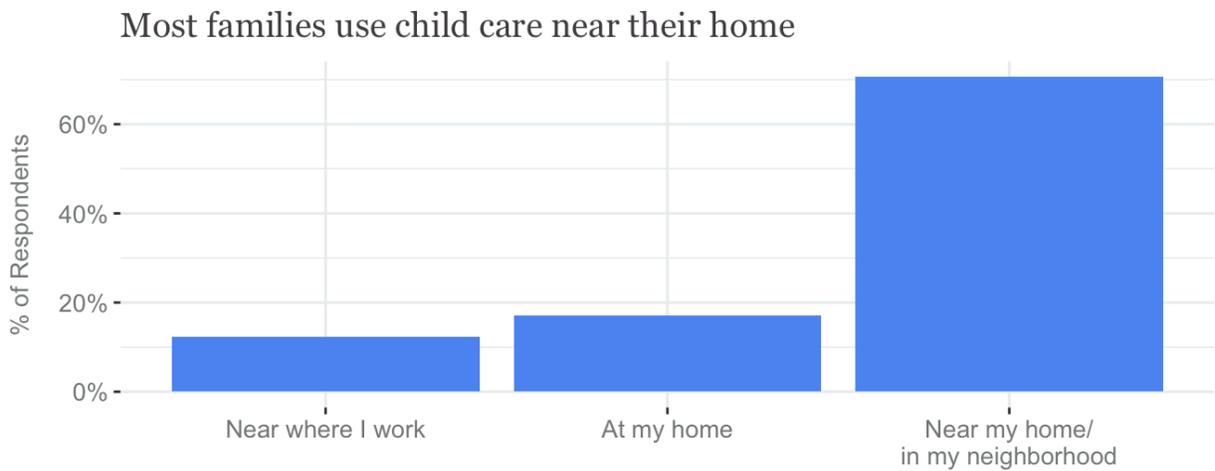
This section looks at how much families reported spending on child care.

### Most families spend between \$0 and \$500 a month on child care

While all survey respondents had children under the age of 18, only a subset of those families (57) had children under the age of six at the time they completed the survey. Because the question on child care spending asked families to recall their child care spending in the last thirty-days (as the last thirty-days would be more salient and more accurate), in this section we only look at the families that had children under six when they completed the survey.



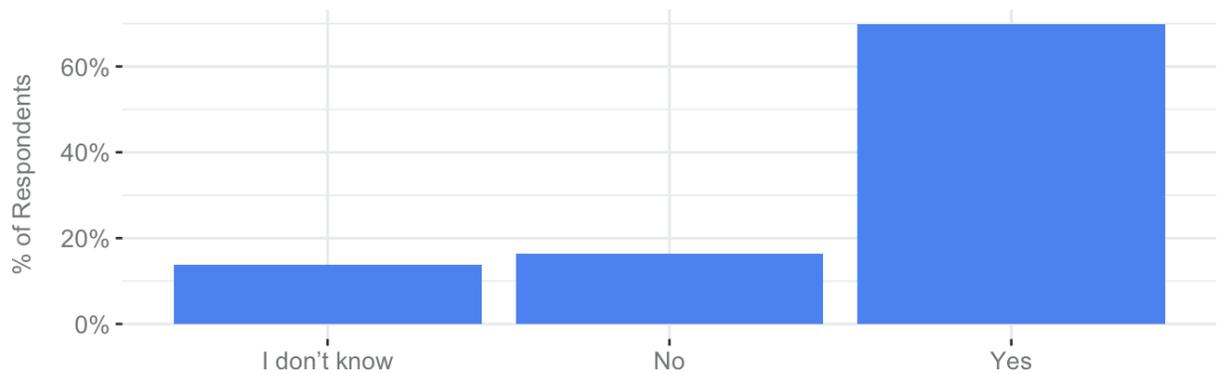
It's important to note, though, that a number of families in the overall survey (25 respondents, almost 1 out of 5) cared for their children at home, and therefore were likely in the group of households with no child care expenditures.



## Licensed Care

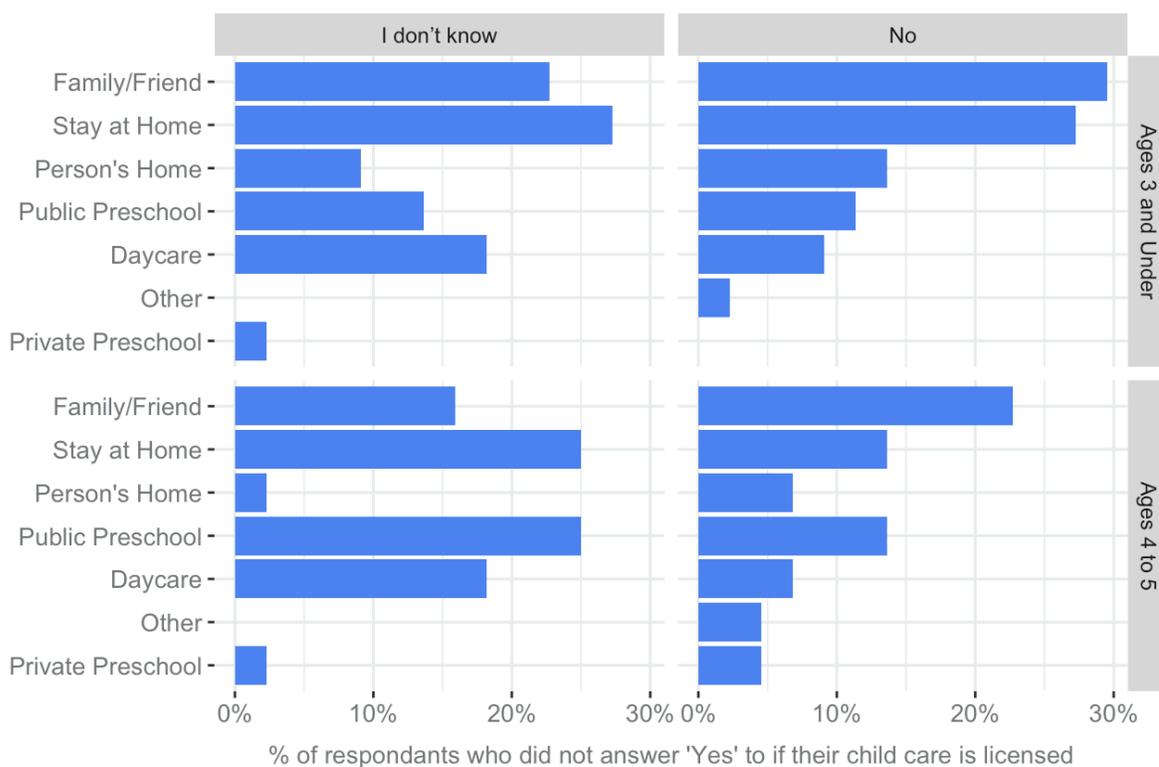
This section explores families utilization of licensed care providers. The majority of families (70%) reported using licensed child care providers.

### One or more of my child care providers is a licensed child care provider or is license-exempt



If we look only at parents who responded "No" or "I don't know" to the statement "One or more of my child care providers is a licensed child care provider or is license-exempt", we can see that many of these families are taking care of their child at home or using a family member or friend for child care. Note here that parents could select more than one form of child care that they use, so these percentages will not add up to 100.

## Many families who are not using licensed care are caring for their child themselves or using family or friends

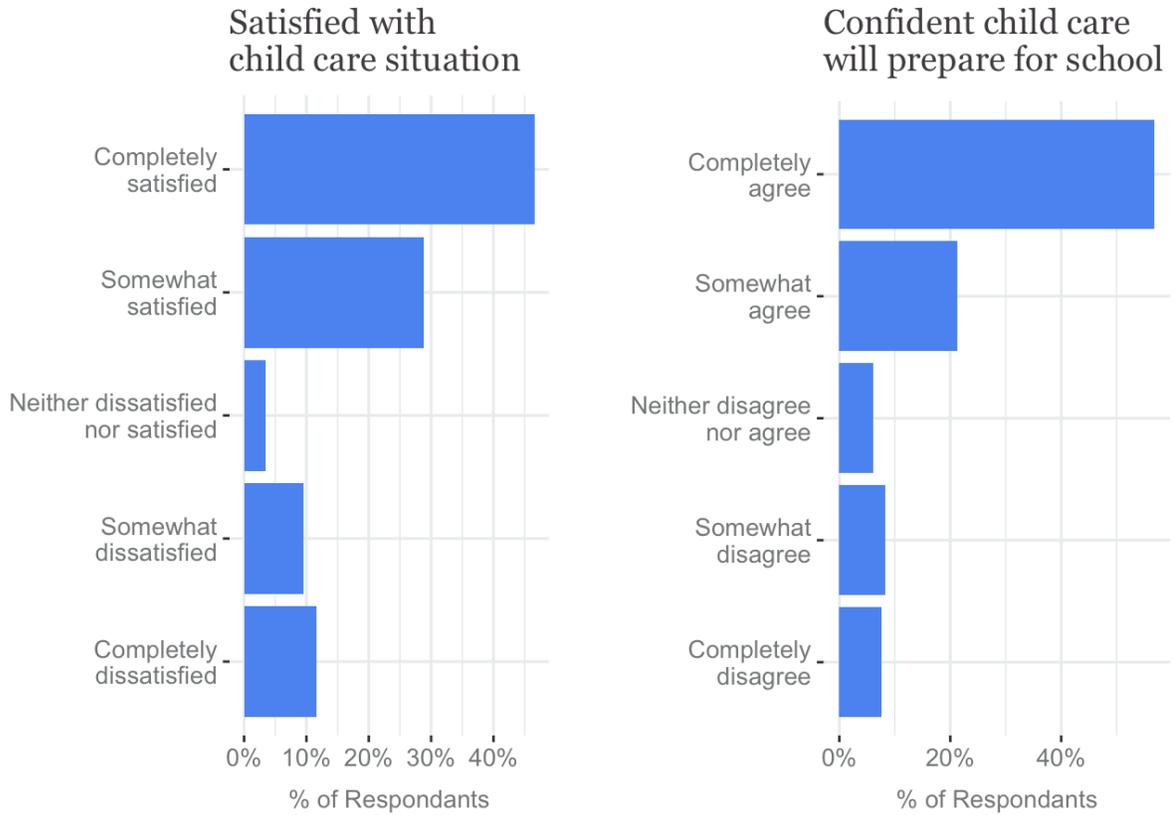


## Satisfaction with Child Care

Families were asked about their satisfaction with their child care arrangements and whether they believed their child care arrangements prepared their children for school. This section explores families' satisfaction with their child care.

### Families were generally happy with, and confident in their child care choices

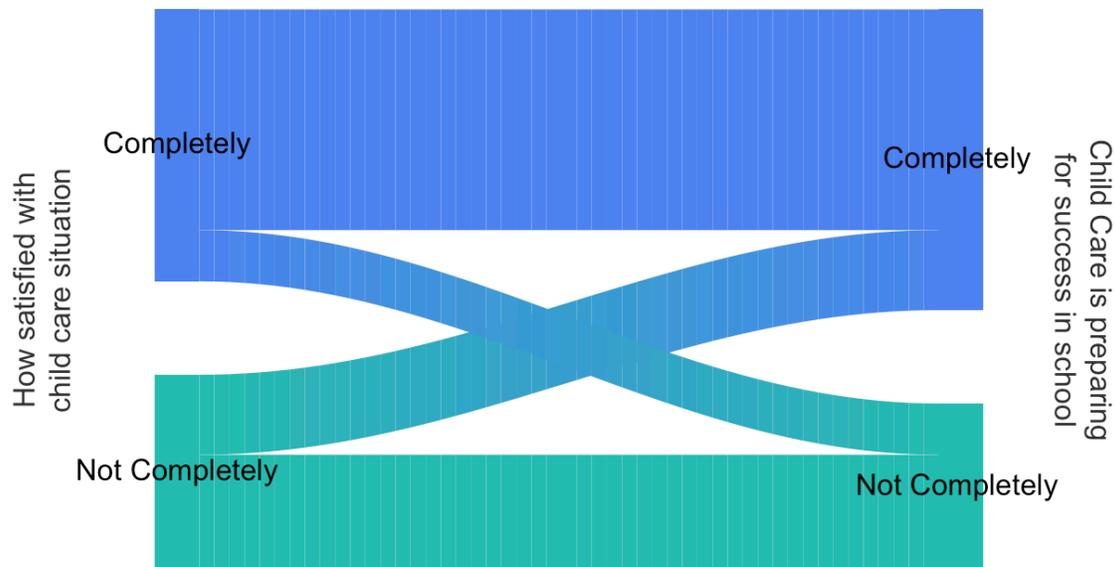
In response to the question "How satisfied are you with your children's child care situation?" and the statement "I am confident that the child care my child or children currently receives is helping to develop the skills they will need to be prepared for and succeed in school", more than 70% of families reported being completely or somewhat satisfied and completely or somewhat confident in their child's preparation for school.



The following diagram shows the overlap between families' responses about their satisfaction with their child care and their confidence that it will prepare their children for school. The width of the lines indicates the number of respondents.

Families that are satisfied with their child care also tend to believe their children are being well prepared for educational success. For those not completely satisfied with their child care, they are more evenly split on whether their child care is preparing their children for success in school.

## Child care satisfaction and school preparedness



### Public preschool and daycare, at a person's home or in a center, rated highly in school preparedness

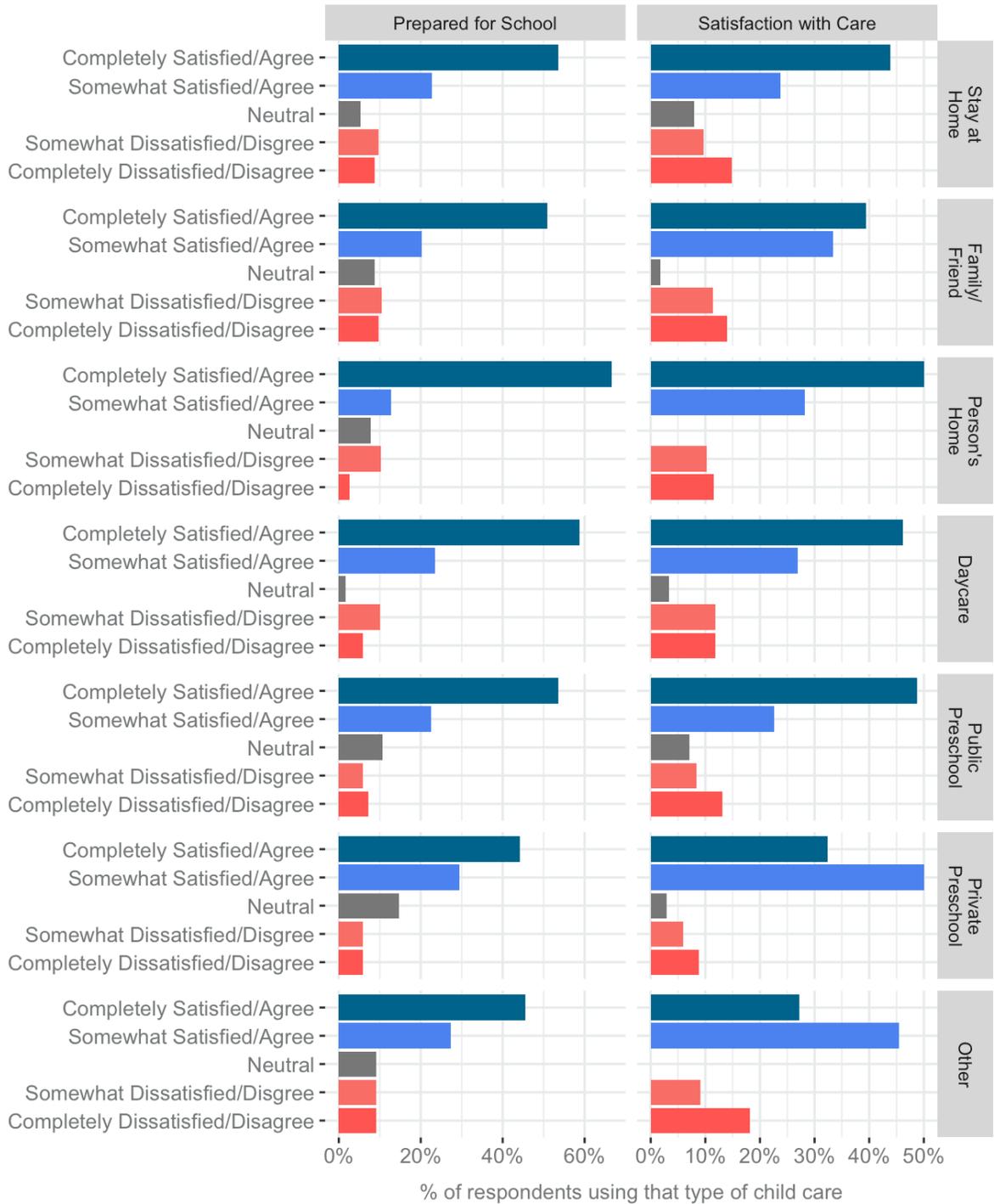
The chart below compares families' evaluation of how well their child care prepared their child for school, and how satisfied they were with their child care depending on which types of care they used.

Parents who used a daycare in someone's home were most frequent to "completely agree" that the care prepared their child for success in school, followed by families using daycare at a center, and then public preschools with friends or family members and parents watching their child at home not far behind.

The same top three types of care -- daycare in someone's home, daycare at a center, and public preschools -- were also rated highly on families' satisfaction with their care. Parents using private preschools or other forms of care were more likely to indicate

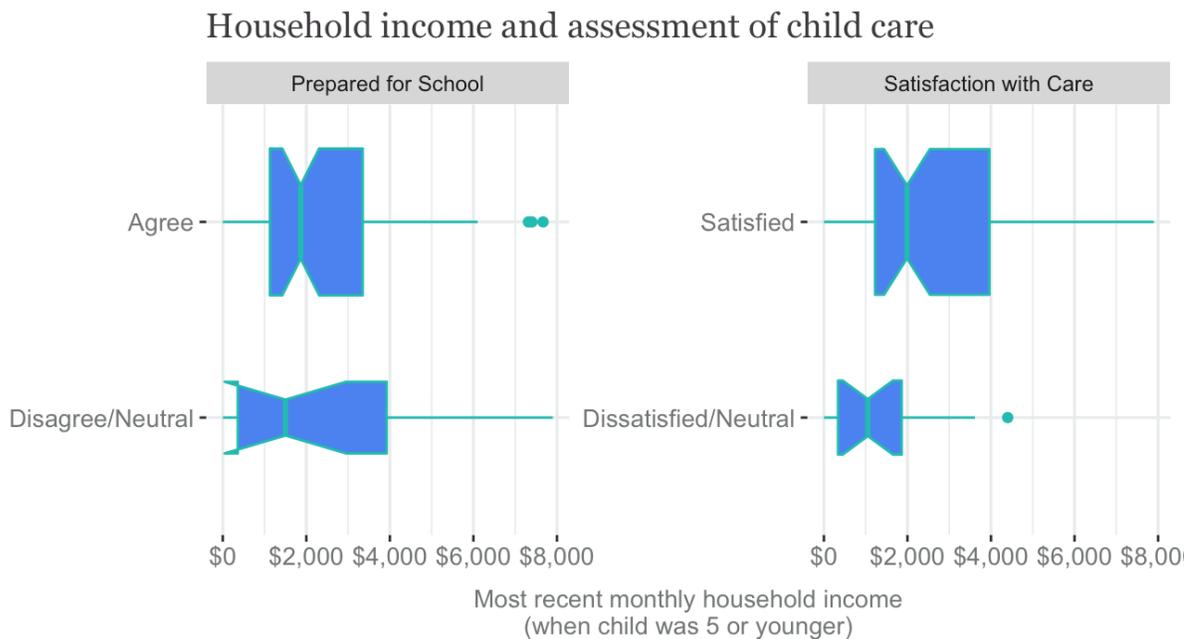
being "somewhat satisfied" while for all other child care arrangements "completely satisfied" was the top response.

Satisfaction & school preparedness by type of care



## Income does not appear to impact parents' perceptions of school preparedness, but is a factor for parents' satisfaction with care arrangements

While there does not appear to be a significant income difference across how well families feel their child care prepared their kids for school, it does appear that families with higher incomes are more likely to be satisfied with their child care arrangements. (This is limited to the 83 families for whom we have income data from when they had a child under the age of 6.)



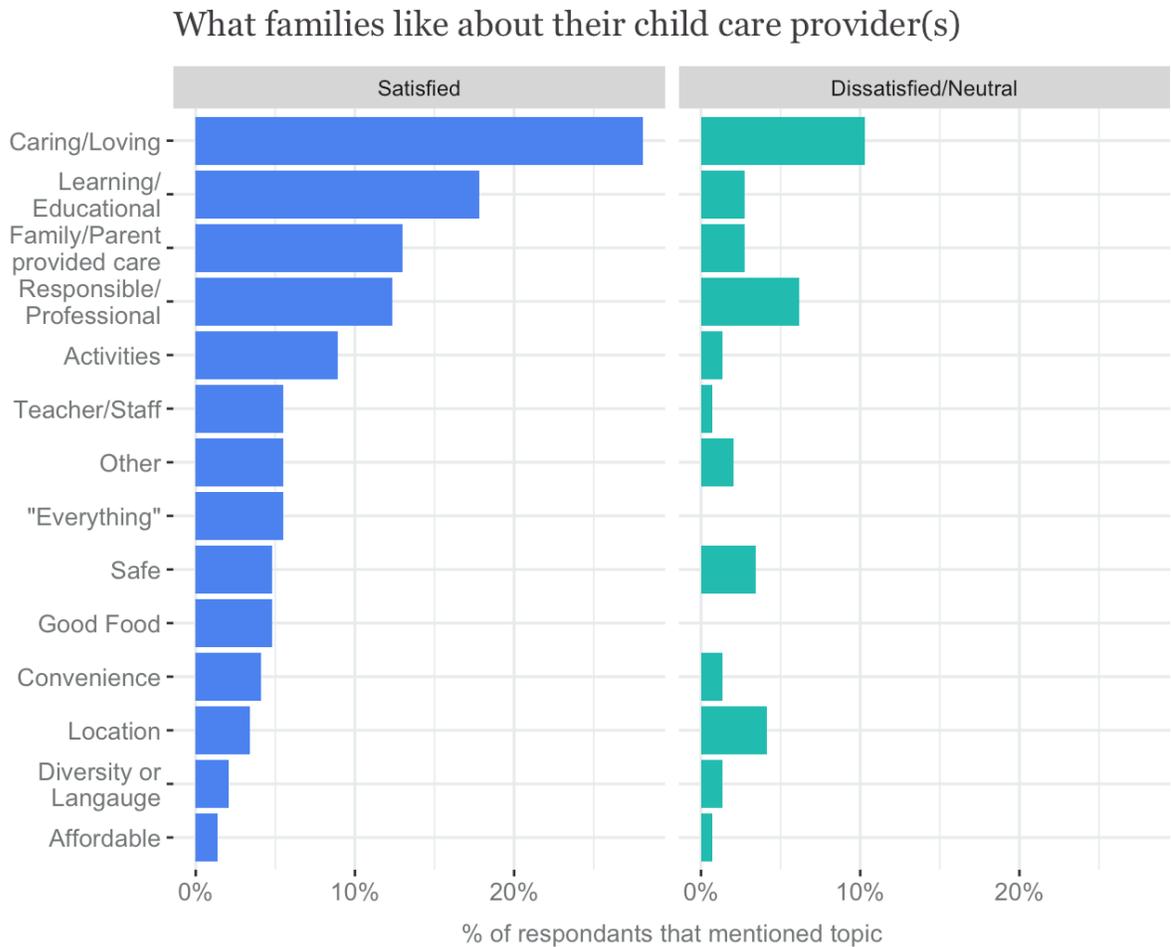
The difference in monthly income for those satisfied versus dissatisfied with care is significant ( $p=0.009$ ) as those satisfied with care have an average income of \$2,596 versus \$1,387 for those not satisfied.

## Child care providers were perceived as warm, professional, and good teachers

Many families mentioned that they like the care and attention their children receive from their child care provider, as well as the professionalism and good educational opportunities.

This chart is split based on whether the parent indicated that they were satisfied with their child care situation. Both groups still have their providers' caring behaviors at the top, while parents who reported being dissatisfied did mention liking their provider's

location and safety more frequently than parents who were satisfied with their child care. Parents who were dissatisfied with their care arrangements were less likely to mention liking the education their children are receiving.



Several parents mentioned the importance of both play and education:

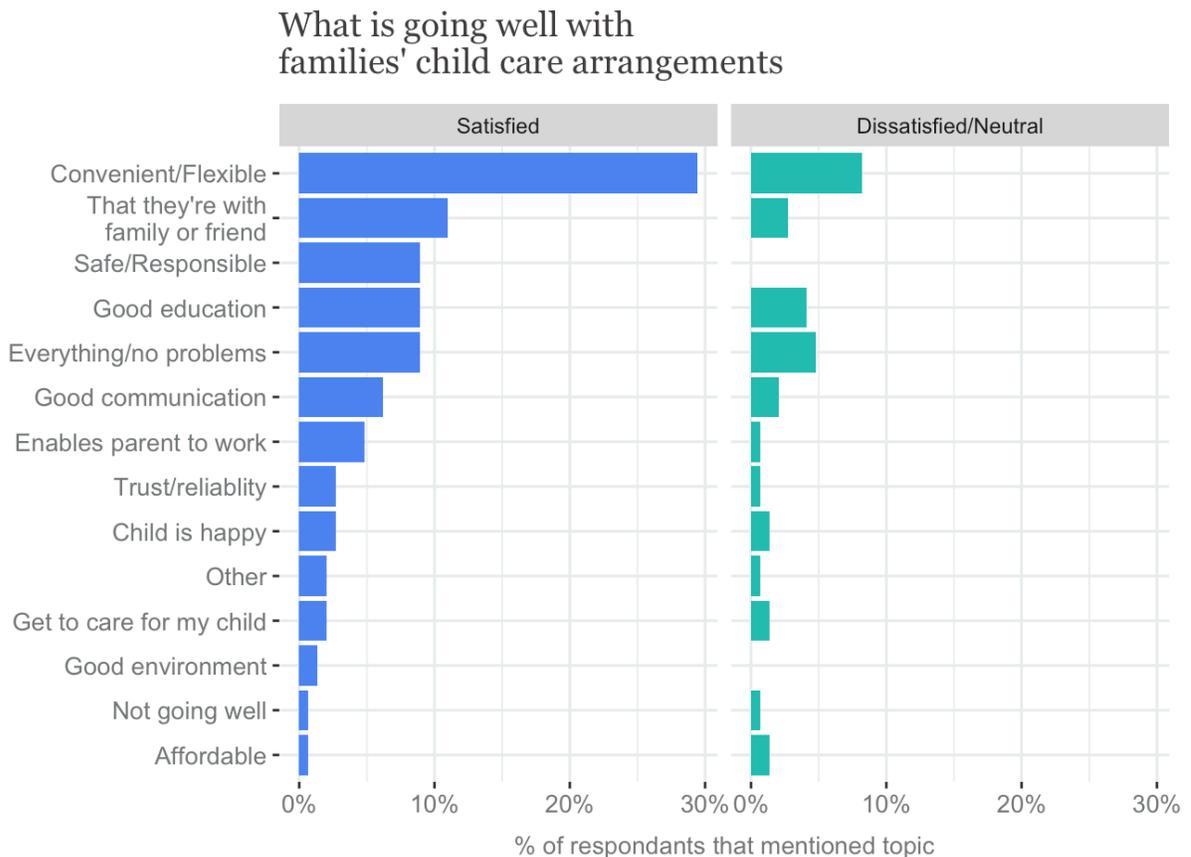
The facility is like a school setting. There is a great balance between playing and learning.

Others talked about their communication with the providers, and the nurturing environment at their facility.

They make one feel safe and make one feel like family. They keep in touch throughout the day. They take their time with each child and go above and beyond to make my child feel comfortably, happy, and safe.

## A variety of things are going well for parents' child care arrangements

A little over a third of parents indicated that their child care is convenient, either in location, hours or both, which was the number one answer for both parents who were satisfied and dissatisfied with their child care arrangements. Some parents who used a friend or family member for care mentioned being happy that their child is with someone they know and trust. Some families that were overall dissatisfied or neutral about their arrangements did still indicate that things were generally going well.



One parent said the following about the impact of good child care on their ability to work:

It's always a relief to go to work and KNOW that your child is taken care of. You can focus more on work.

Another parent talked about the struggles and benefits they've experienced:

No ha sido un camino fácil . Al cuidar de ellos cuando necesitaban cuidado nos afectó económicamente , pero valió el sacrificio por los valores inculcados // It has not been an easy road. Caring for them when they needed care affected us financially, but it was worth the sacrifice for the values inculcated.

## **Families' Advice for Improving Child Care**

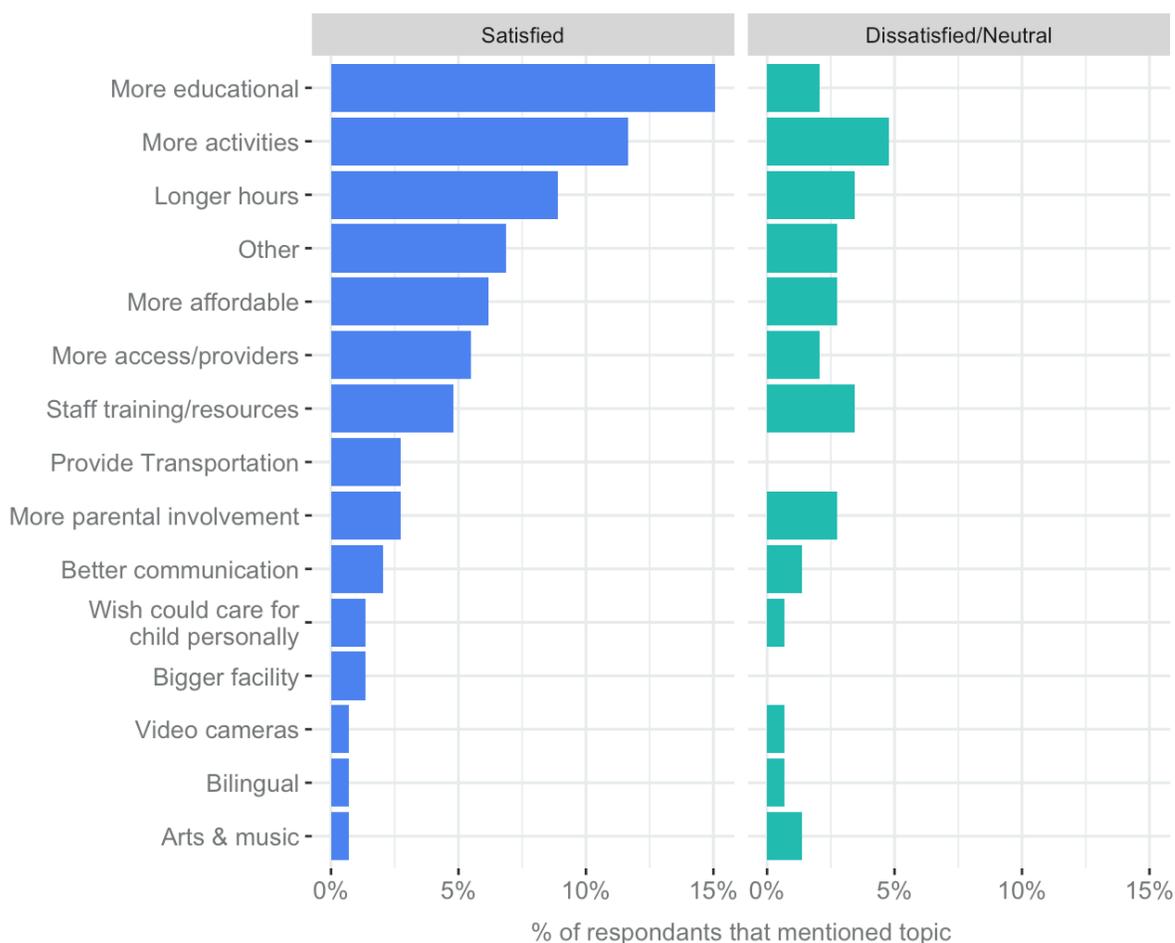
Families were asked about their advice for other families and what resources if any they felt would help them better care for their children. This section explores their answers.

### **Families are focused on education and enrichment, but also need convenient, affordable care**

When asked "What ideas do you have for improving your children's child care?", many families mentioned that they'd like even more educational programs, and more activities, both for play and for learning. The third most often mentioned topic was longer or more convenient hours, followed closely by making care more affordable.

Here again the chart is split on whether or not the parent indicated being satisfied with their child care arrangements. Parents who were dissatisfied were somewhat more likely to mention activities or staff training and resources as suggestions for improvements, but also mentioned a variety of other ideas.

## What ideas do you have for improving your children's child care?



One parent mentioned the importance of family and community in child care:

I personally believe that we should utilize our elders in childcare for our youth bringing the village approach back to raising children.

A few said they wanted to be more involved in their children's care:

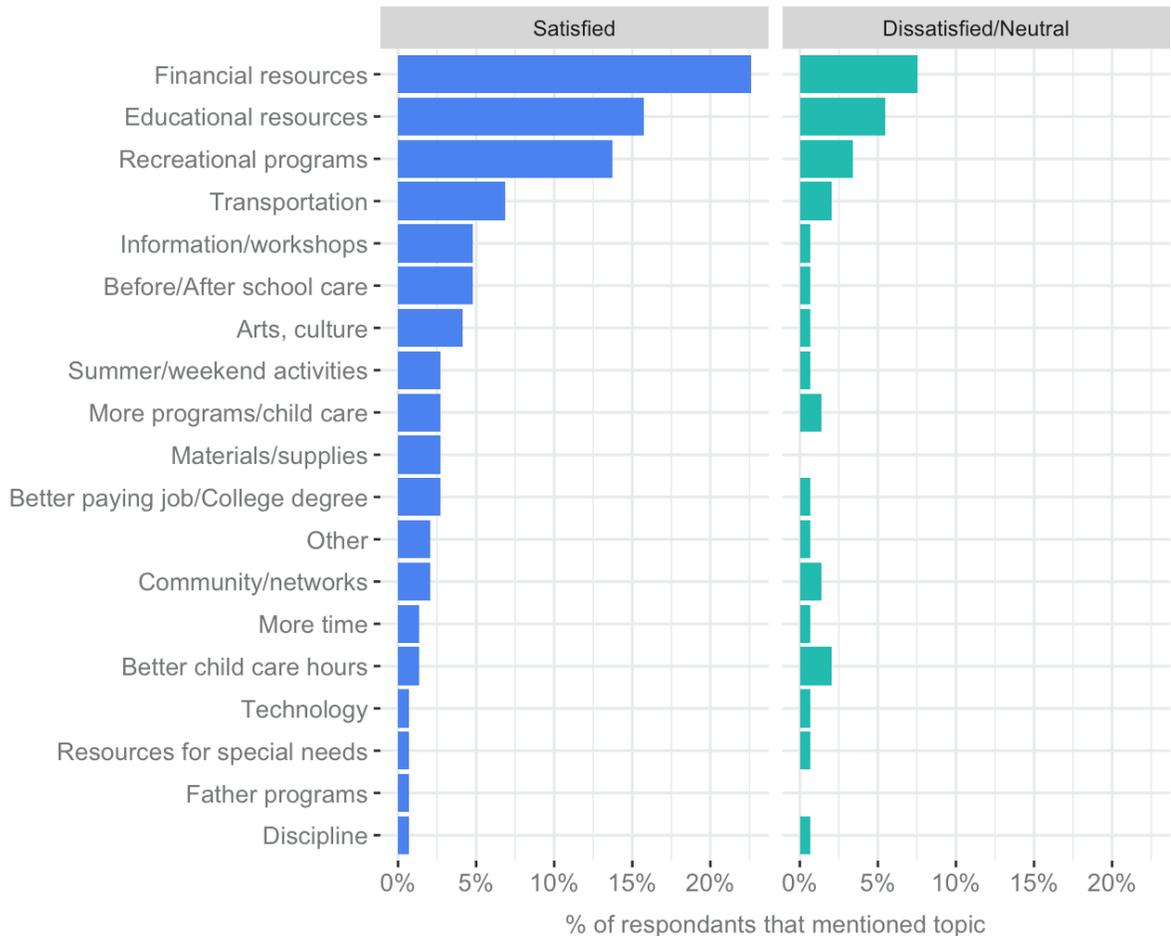
Create Parent Committee

### Parents want financial support and educational resources

In keeping with their suggestions for improvement, when asked "What, if any, resources do you want to help you as a parent?", respondents mentioned financial assistance, educational resources, and activities for their children. This chart is also split based on

parents' satisfaction with their child care arrangements, but the first three responses are fairly similar across both groups.

### What, if any, resources do you want to help you as a parent?



### Parents care about their children's happiness and bringing their family together

Some respondents had creative ideas for resources that could enrich their children's lives outside of academics.

Birthdays, summertime, and holidays are tough to fund. I know there are some free summer activities and holiday help but it is like jumping through hoops to get it sometimes. Birthday help would be especially great since I never heard of an organization that does that. It could change a lot of children's lives.

Open up a mother and daughter camp so parents can spend more time with the kids away from home work school for this stay home moms

Assistance in purchasing technological tools such as an ipad to enhance my son's learning experience as well as having affordable opportunities/programs (going to museums & or aquariums, playing musical instruments, kids shows/plays) that would peak son's interest in the arts.

### **Parents want to improve their own lives as well**

In their responses, some parents mentioned resources that would help them get a better job, or gain more education themselves, so that they can, in turn, provide more for their children. These included parents who said they'd like:

A better job with more pay

Access to wifi bcuz I don't have it at home. The library can be a challenge.

College degree

## **Social Capital and Informal Child Care**

Formal child care providers are far from the only option families have for child care. Using data from FII's monthly journals, we found that 65% of respondents engaged in child care related social capital exchanges with people in their network, with 42% reporting one or more instances of people in their networks providing child care services to their families.

Earlier in this report we established that relatively lower-income families report lower levels of satisfaction with their child care than relatively higher income families. To learn about how families cope with access to lower-quality child care options we turned to FII's social capital data set to explore if and how families support one another around child care.

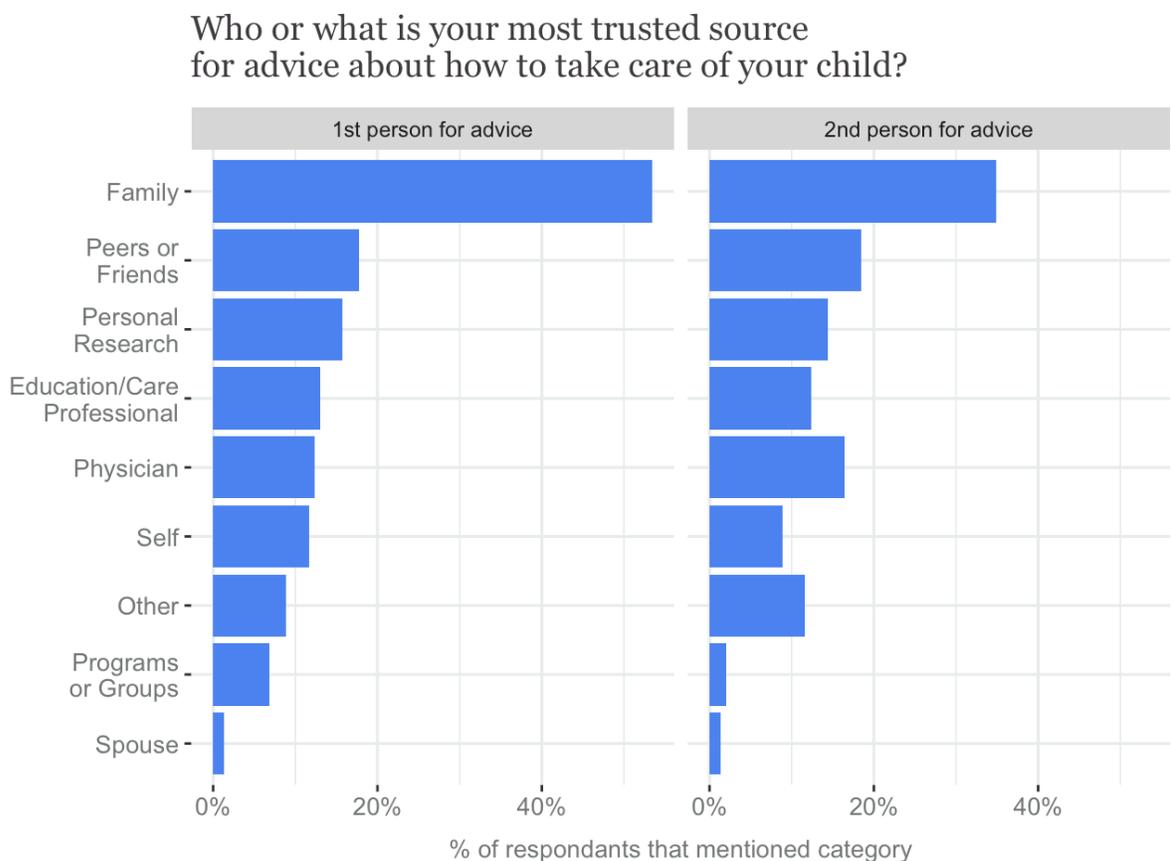
In FII's monthly journals families are asked to categorize and *monitize* (that is, estimate monetary value) for the social capital transactions they engage in. For example, one family may give another a ride to work, and while no cash was exchanged, they would record an estimated monetary value in their journal.

Using the social capital data set, and sub-setting just to child care related activities, we found that families that were less satisfied with their child care are significantly more likely to receive child care related social capital. Families that were less satisfied with their child care received an average of \$334 in social capital related child care services versus just \$42 for those that were satisfied with their child care ( $p=0.047$ ).

## Advice from Families

### Parents turn to their families first for advice on child care

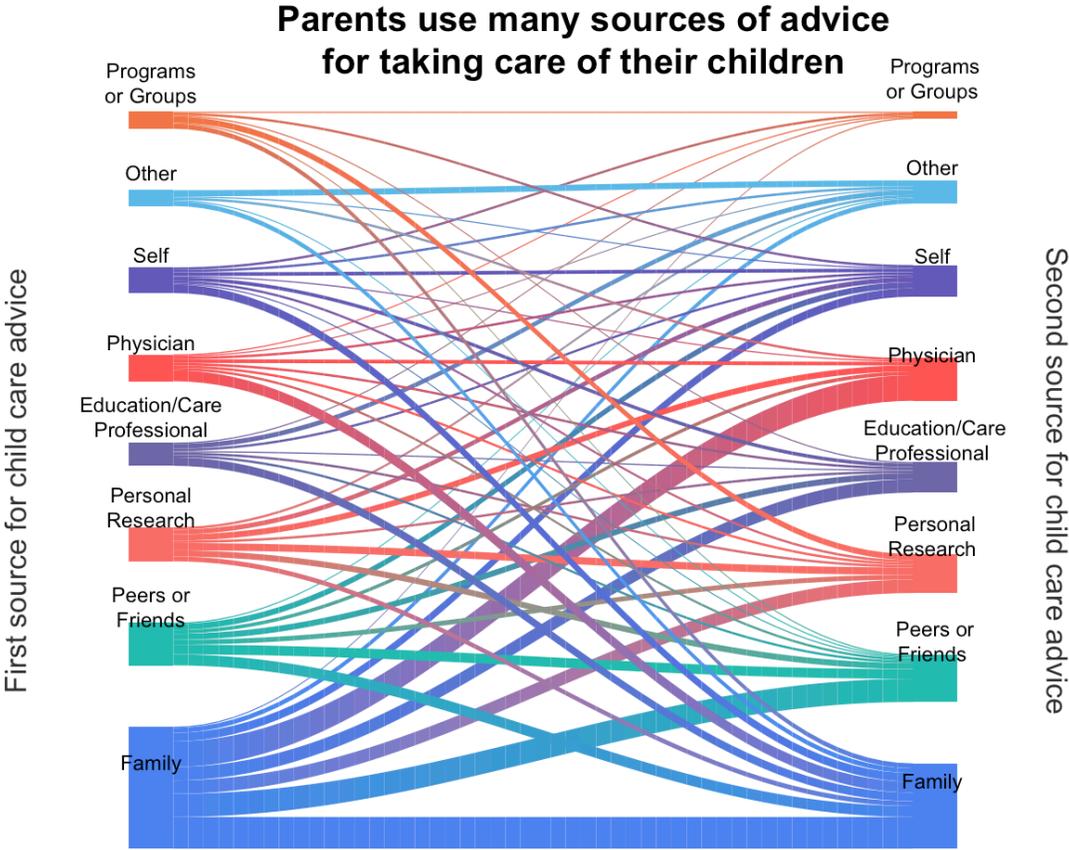
When asked "Who or what is your most trusted source for advice about how to take care of your child?" a plurality of parents mentioned some family member as both their first and second source of advice, followed by a mix of other answers, including other parents, professionals such as doctors or educators, and their own research.



This diagram below indicates the crossover between parents' stated first and second source for advice about taking care of their child, with the width of the lines indicating

the number of respondents. We can see that in general there is much variety between families' sources of advice, though a large number of parents who mentioned family members indicated them as both their first and second people to go to.

Note that these answers were in an open text box. Families may have mentioned more than one of these categories in their first and second answers. They also may have answered something like "my mother" for their first source and "my uncle" for their second source, and both would be marked as "family" in this chart.

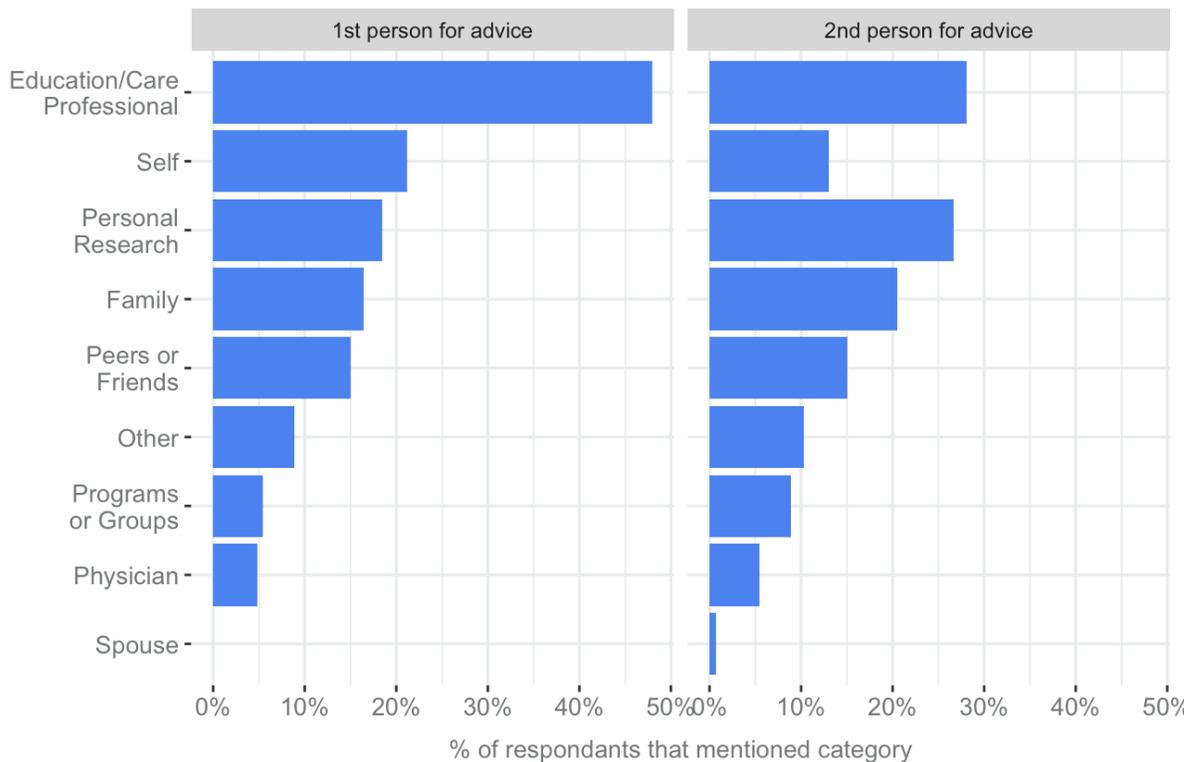


### For school advice, parents turn to professionals and research

On the other hand, when asked, "Who or what is your most trusted source for advice about how to prepare your child for learning at school?", almost half of parents

mentioned teachers or other educational professionals first, followed by personal research and family members or other parents.

### Who or what is your most trusted source for advice about how to prepare your child for learning at school?

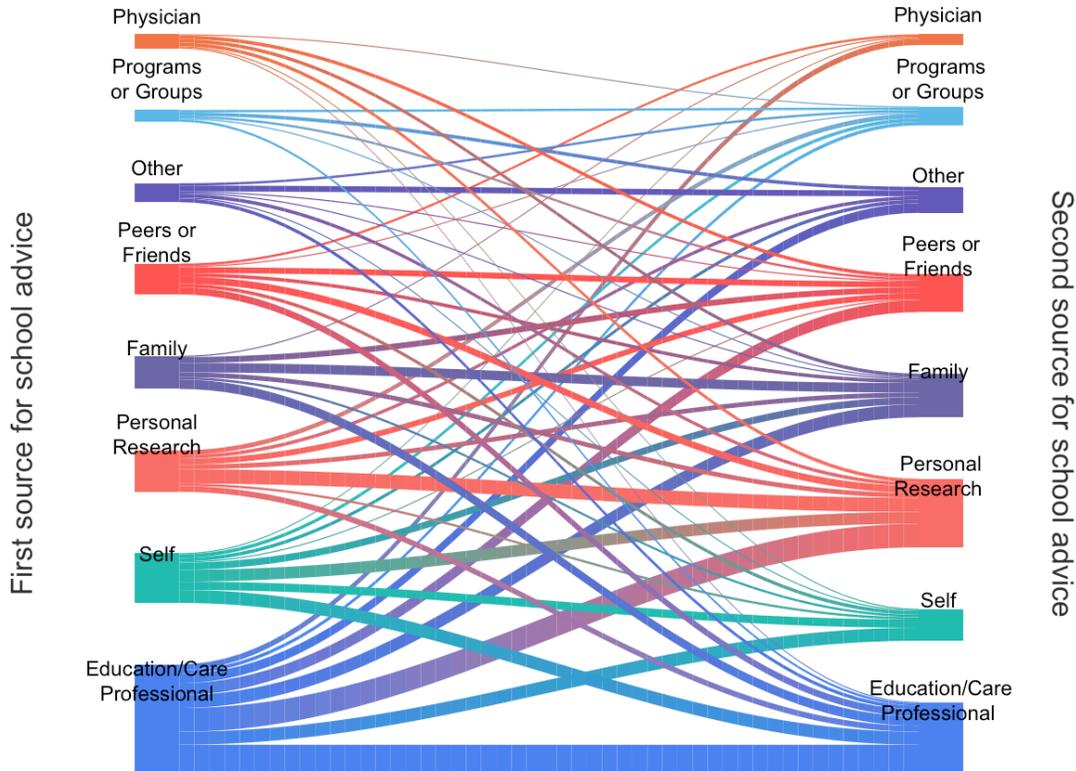


As above, this diagram below indicates the crossover between parents' stated first and second source for advice about their child's education and schooling, with the width of the lines indicating the number of respondents.

More than with parent's advice sources for child care, we can see more lines here that go straight across, meaning that parents mentioned that category as their first and second place to go for information. We can see this between "Peers or Friends", "Family", "Personal Research", "Education/Care Professional" and "Other".

Note that these answers were in an open text box and families may have mentioned more than one of these categories in their first and second answers.

## Parents utilize a variety of sources for school advice

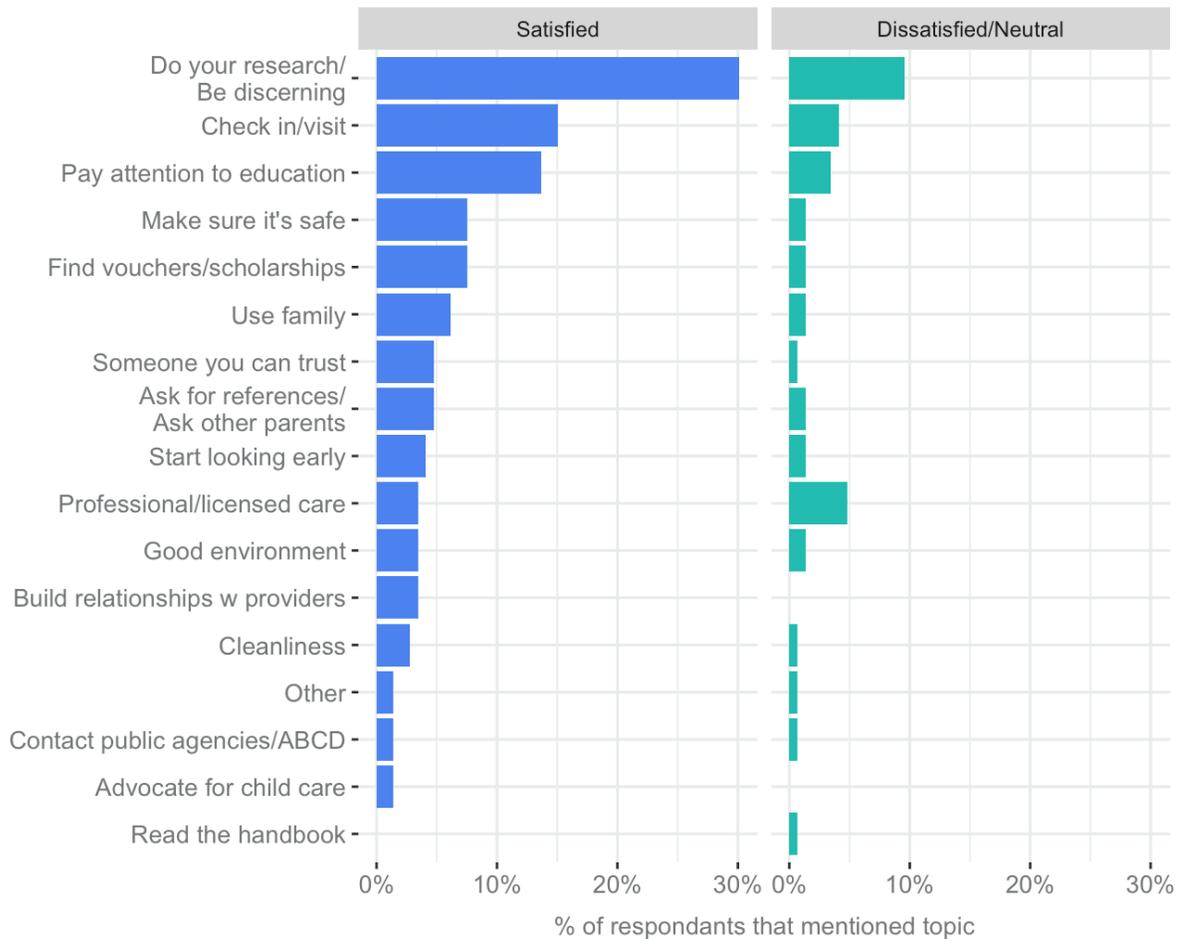


### Parents advise others to be selective and check in on their child care arrangements

When asked "What advice do you have for parents of young children seeking child care?", many parents advised others to do their research, start early, and take their time to find the best place for their child, which was mentioned by about 40% of respondents. Additionally, many respondents' work didn't stop there, and they advise continuing to check in on the provider over time.

Parents who were dissatisfied with their child care were more likely to mention the importance of licensed or professional care than parents who were happy with their care.

## What advice do you have for parents of young children seeking child care?



Several parents talked about building relationships with providers and continuing to be involved in their child's care:

Build meaningful but professional relationships with teachers, staff, and other parents associated with your child's school and/or child care providers. It takes a village to make things work and these relationships help significantly.

The top answer from many parents was to take their time to find the right place for their child. This parent also advised other parents to remember the support they have from their community as well:

Be flexible and patient, but do not settle for mediocre or subpar or unsafe child care because you cannot find anyone at the time. Also, other adults are not going to parent your child the same way you do. So,

be patient and understanding especially if the child care provider is a safe place. Safety first, always. Oh, and finally: ask for help and do not be ashamed/afraid. You may not be aware of the supports you have within your network until you ask.

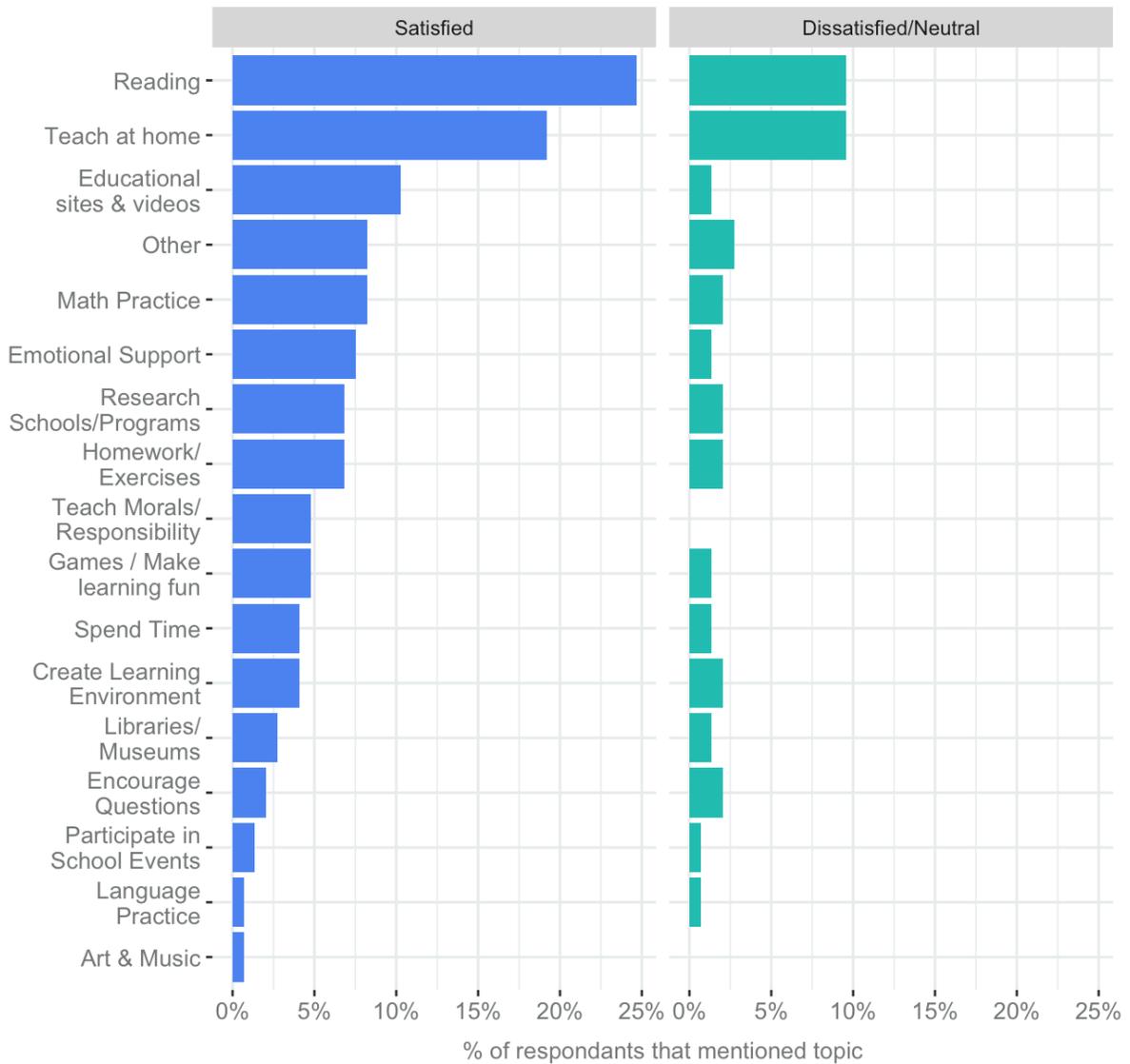
One parent also advised others to advocate for early childhood education policies:

Apoyar las campañas de apoyo para la temprana educación // Support the support campaigns for early education

### **Parents are augmenting their children's education at home**

When asked, "What have you done to prepare your children for learning in school that you would share with other families?" many parents said they teach their kids at home, and encourage other parents to read to their children, and this was common across parents who were satisfied and dissatisfied with their child care situation.

## What have you done to prepare your children for learning in school that you would share with other families



### One parent talked about building trust and communication with your child:

Always keep communication open discuss any & all age appropriate information. They will be willing to confront you in return.

### Again some parents talked about the importance of networks and community:

I stay active in my community and connect with people and orgs that can lead is in the right direction. All in an effort to model for my son, how to advocate for self and navigate resources

Many parents are teaching and reading with their children at home, and generally spending time with their kids:

La primera escuela está en la casa, así que hablarle, cantarle, leerle y pasar tiempo de calidad con nuestros hijos! // The first school is in the home, so talk, sing, read and spend quality time with our children!

## Survey

The survey was administered online using a survey software platform designed for mobile and desktop browsers. Below is a recreation of the survey items, answer options, and question prompts. Only the English text is included below, however the survey was available to respondents in both English and Spanish.

### Survey Items

*The first two questions focus on how you provide or have provided child care for your children when they were aged three or under and when they were four and five.*

1. Select all the child care arrangements you currently use or have used in the past for your children aged three years old and under.
  - I stayed home with my child
  - A family member or friend cared for my child
  - I sent my child to daycare at a person's home
  - I sent my child to a daycare center
  - I sent my child to private preschool
  - I sent my child to public preschool
2. Select all the child care arrangements you currently use or have used in the past for your children aged four to five years old.
  - I have never had children four years old or older
  - I stayed home with my child
  - A family member or friend cared for my child
  - I sent my child to a daycare center

- I sent my child to daycare at a person's home
- I sent my child to private preschool
- I sent my child to public preschool

*The following questions are about child care providers you currently utilize. By "child care provider" we mean a person (other than yourself or your partner) such as a family member, friend, or a business, that provides child care to your child or children.*

3. Over the last thirty days, how much money did you spend on child care providers?
  - I did not spend any money on child care providers in the last thirty days
  - \$1 - \$125
  - \$126 - \$250
  - \$251 - \$375
  - \$376 - \$500
  - \$501 - \$625
  - \$626 - \$750
  - \$751 - \$875
  - \$876 - \$1,000
  - \$1,001 - \$1,125
  - \$1,126 - \$1,250
  - \$1,251 - \$1,375
  - \$1,376 - \$1,500
  - \$1,501+
4. Where is/are your child care provider(s) located?
  - At my home
  - Near my home/in my neighborhood
  - Near where I work
5. One or more of my child care providers is a licensed child care provider or is license-exempt
  - I don't know
  - No

- Yes

6. What do you like about your child care provider(s)?
7. What ideas do you have for improving your children's child care?

*The following questions pertain to your children's overall child care, not just their child care provider(s). When answering these questions think about both any child care providers you may utilize as well as the child care you and your family provide your children in your home.*

8. How satisfied are you with your children's child care situation?
  - Completely dissatisfied
  - Somewhat dissatisfied
  - Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Completely satisfied
9. I am confident that the child care my child or children currently receives is helping to develop the skills they will need to be prepared for and succeed in school.
  - Completely disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Completely agree

10. What's going well for you as a parent with respect to your child care arrangements?

11. What if any resources do you want to help you as a parent?

12. What advice do you have for parents of young children seeking child care?

*The following questions are about who or what sources you turn to for information or advice on how to take care of your child.*

13. Who or what is your most trusted source for advice about how to take care of your child?

14. Who or what is your second most trusted source for advice about how to take care of your child?

*The following questions are about who or what sources you turn to for information or about preparing your child for learning in school.*

15. Who or what is your most trusted source for advice about how to prepare your child for learning at school?
16. Who or what is your second most trusted source for advice about how to prepare your child for learning at school?
17. What have you done to prepare your children for learning in school that you would share with other families?
18. Would you like additional information about early childhood resources from the Boston Foundation? If so, your email will be shared with the Boston Foundation.
  - No, do not share my email address with the Boston Foundation
  - Yes, share my email address with the Boston Foundation