



Understanding and Improving the Child Care Experience for Families*

A Research Study

by

**The Innovation Office of the San Francisco Human Services Agency
for the San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education**

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Summary:

Background: Mayor Edwin Lee created the San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education (OECE) (sfoece.org) in 2012. The purpose has been to improve access to high quality early care and education for children ages 0-5, and to build the capacity of the early care and education system. This includes the capacity of the workforce that supports the system. OECE doesn't provide services directly to the public. Instead, it manages and distributes federal, state and local funding. An important part of this funding includes child care vouchers. OECE relies on the San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) (sfhsa.org) for some internal operations, such as accounting, human resources, and innovating service delivery. HSA helps over 200,000 San Franciscans experiencing poverty and abuse with a mission to promote well-being and self-sufficiency.

Research: In November 2016, a six-person team from OECE and HSA completed a three-month-long research project to answer two broad questions:

1. How do low-income families experience the subsidized child care process in San Francisco?
2. How might OECE use these insights to improve families' experiences when accessing and receiving child care?

The team interviewed 28 parents or guardians for about 45 minutes each. All had a child 3 years old or younger. The team recruited 75% of the interviewees from a database of HSA clients receiving CalWORKs (cash aid and/or job assistance). However, some of these families were not currently using their voucher to access child care, and OECE wanted to learn more about them. Community partners helped identify and recruit the remaining 25% of the families interviewed by the team.

The research team also partnered with Children’s Council of San Francisco and Wu Yee Children’s Services (child care resource and referral organizations or “R&Rs”) for a mini-Diary Study¹. R&Rs help parents find, and pay for child care. Employees working with the public anonymously recorded the questions people asked them about child care. They gathered 53 separate interactions/sets of questions from families who called or walked-in looking for information about child care during November 2016.

Results: The four main findings of the study are:

1. The child care process can be relatively quick and straightforward for some low-income families, and incredibly confusing, frustrating and lengthy for others. Five of the 28 interviewees reported *accessing* child care as “easy” or “simple” or were grateful for it. These families often had an active case manager, such as homeless families and teenage mothers. Others understood the system and felt they had a guaranteed spot for their child at a convenient location, often because an older sibling is at the same place. And yet, all of the families described struggles with poverty: homelessness, fluctuations in income, or other factors that may seem external to child care, but directly impact their ability to *maintain* it.

Twenty-three families shared challenges with the process. They experienced different obstacles or “pain-points” across five phases of the child care process, namely:

1. before starting (e.g., searching for housing & work, changes in income, mistrusting others),
2. becoming aware & finding child care (e.g., unclear process, where to go & right questions to ask),
3. comparing providers & applying (e.g., calling, visiting, waiting; finding one provider for siblings),
4. onboarding and maintaining child care (e.g., paperwork and ongoing child care fees, including rising fees for working more hours each week),
5. next steps (e.g., selecting schools, preparing for kindergarten) .

¹ Kim Flaherty, Diary Studies: Understanding Long-Term User Behavior and Experiences, Nielsen Norman Group, June 5, 2016, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/diary-studies/>.

2. When it comes to making decisions about child care, families value their child's physical and social well-being over logistics (location, cost, etc.).

The research team identified 15 factors that shape families' decision-making process when choosing a child care provider. The research team then asked interviewees to prioritize the factors from lowest to highest. The top four include:

- (1st) physical and emotional wellbeing of child (e.g., safe and clean),
- (2nd) emotional wellbeing of parent/guardian (e.g., trust in child care provider, licensed care),
- (3rd) child's education (e.g., daily learning activities), and
- (4th) logistics (e.g., fulltime care, provider has availability, location).

3. Families shared beliefs (a mental model) about child care being a place for their child's education and safety. Twenty-six interviewees described "quality" child care in:

- 21 separate ways to mean "education"
- 11 unique responses that reference "safety"
- 11 different, general comments grouped as "logistics" and "good providers".

4. Eight families in the CalWORKs program reported not always using their child care voucher for the following reasons: lack of steady work which disqualifies them from child care services, mistrust/fear of child abuse by caregivers that are not family members, and frustration with the child care process.

4 Recommendations

1st: OECE and their partners incorporate a Human-Centered Design (HCD) process to support families' experiences and success throughout the child care process.

Human-Centered Design (HCD)² provides a process and templates to co-create service improvements where OECE and their partners can develop and test ideas creating an iterative process to improve families' experiences along their child care journey. As the interviews in this study show, a family's situation and context have significant impact on how and why they make decisions about child care and what types of support they can access. While each families' child care journey is unique to their current circumstances, all families pass through the same five phases of a child care journey (see following page).

By adopting an HCD approach, the starting point is asking, "What are the 'family's needs' in this situation or context?" This question focuses on what barriers the family is struggling with (e.g., finding a provider or affording the monthly fee, etc.) as well as broader life needs (e.g., fulltime work, overcoming trauma, etc.). Some reoccurring barriers voiced by interviewees included:

- Their struggle to enroll siblings in the same program: Several parents talked about receiving offers for child care for only one of their children, and struggled to find availability and financial support for multiple children at the same provider.
- Their need for extended child care hours: Several parents expressed difficulty in balancing work or school schedules with their child care providers' hours of operation, having to pay fees for being late and needing child care during the evening to accommodate their family's needs.

A human-centered design approach may also be valuable to overcome "paralysis by analysis"³ of examining data to the extent that action to improve families' child care experiences is delayed or never occurs. Instead HCD encourages ongoing testing of hypotheses or informed assumptions to improve service delivery.

² Stanford University d.School, Bootcamp Bootleg, 2010, <https://dschool.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/BootcampBootleg2010v2SLIM.pdf>.

³ Attributed to strategic management thinker and practitioner H. Igor Ansoff by Carol Kennedy in Guide to the Management Gurus, 5th Edition, Random House, 2012, <https://goo.gl/l7dkQv>.

Examples:

- Families may not know the right questions to ask when entering the doors of R&Rs or child care providers. How might we help with this? Could we provide them with key questions to ask at each phase of the child care journey, a checklist of things they need to do, and infographics to visualize the process?
- Families' experiences with R&Rs are inconsistent at different phases of the child care process. How might we improve this? Could we encourage R&R employees (especially those who spend the most time working with the public) to test their ideas to provide more consistent service experiences?

2nd Recommendation: Creating more effective and efficient services across families' child care journey should be contextualized within the five phases below, with a particular focus on families' immediate child care needs.⁴



⁴ James Kalbach, Mapping Experiences, Figure 3-10, 2016, <http://shop.oreilly.com/product/0636920038870.do?sortby=publicationDate>.

The five phases framework is important for two reasons:

First, it widens the possibilities for improvements. For example: a formerly homeless interviewee wasn't allowed to use her voucher to pay for child care when attending therapy and looking for housing. Trying to change this regulation is an important, longer-term solution; we can also expand our options for the short-term by maintaining a focus on families' needs. How might we help parents find housing and improve their mental health? Could a therapist or affordable housing specialist help families after their CalWORKs appointments or be onsite at a community partner?

The second reason for using the five phases framework is to identify where families struggle with the child care process in order to anticipate their pain points at each phase and align resources and partners to address them better.



In terms of measuring the effectiveness in using the five phases framework to improve the public experience with subsidized child care, OECE and its partners could use a Results-Based Accountability (RBA)⁵ framework to measure how many people were served and the type of service received; how well the services were provided, and how families are better off or not.

⁵ Mark Friedman, *Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough*, 2nd Edition, 2015 <http://raguide.org/index-of-questions/>.

3rd Recommendation: Enhance families' understanding of the financial assistance available to them and how the centralized eligibility list works.

Interviewees expressed confusion and frustration in the discovery and commit phases about their child care journeys. Several parents were specifically frustrated that the R&Rs referred them to providers who did not have current openings. More than a third of families served by the R&Rs in the diary study had questions related to how the centralized eligibility list works or their status on the list. A similar proportion of families requested information about financial assistance available to support their child care needs. OECE and their partners could enhance both how and what information is shared with families.

4th Recommendation: Use technology to help families meet their immediate needs, including:

- An easy way to understand the child care process. Possibilities include animated videos and infographics as well as checklists families (and R&Rs) can use as a guide throughout the five phases of the childcare process. Such information would be on the websites for OECE and R&Rs.
- A simple way for families to ask a question, offer feedback about their experiences, and escalate a concern to OECE regarding their child care experience or with an R&R and provider. Mobile technologies offer numerous opportunities as does a clear brand/communications strategy so families know what OECE is, and how to contact them if needed. The San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) has the text messaging capability to provide some of these services already.
- A central place where families can easily search and apply for HSA services to help with the other life challenges they may be experiencing that could derail their desire to keep childcare. Integration of HSA and OECE services and websites (sfhsa.org & sfoece.org) may help in this regard.

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Introduction

In November 2016, a six-person team from the City and County of San Francisco's [Office of Early Care and Education \(OECE\)](#) and the [Human Services Agency \(HSA\)](#) completed month-long research project. The purpose was to answer two broad questions:

1. How do low-income families experience the subsidized child care process in San Francisco?

In order to answer the first question, we also asked:

- 1a. How do families make their child care decisions?
- 1b. What does “quality” child care mean to them?
- 1d. What obstacles do they experience accessing and maintaining subsidized child care?
- 1c. What obstacles do families who receive CalWORKs (cash aid and/or job training) experience when trying to use their child care voucher?

2. How might OECE use these insights to improve families' experiences with child care?

The body of the report tries to present information in an accessible and usable way. The goal is to respect a wide audience who may read this report (including the research participants) and help OECE and their community partners apply the findings to better serve families needing subsidized child care and early education for their children.



What did the research team do? **H**ow? **W**ith whom?



The research team recruited and interviewed 28 people. Interviews happened in families' homes, at community organizations, and onsite in the Office of Early Care and Education (OECE) and the Human Services Agency (HSA). 75% of these families were identified in HSA's database of clients with a child three years of age or younger who are currently receiving services from CalWORKs (cash aid and/or job assistance). This included families using and not using their CalWORKs voucher to pay for child care. Community partners recruited the remaining 25% of the families, whom the team interviewed.⁶ OECE wanted to find out more about these families in an attempt to better meet their needs.

The research team partnered with Children's Council of San Francisco and Wu Yee Children's Services (child care resource and referral organizations) for a mini-"Diary Study." Employees from these two organizations documented the questions families asked about child care. They gathered 53 separate interactions/sets of questions from families. No personal identifying information was included about the people asking the questions or from the employees who typed up the information. The purpose was to get another perspective on families' experiences with the child care process based on what they actually do (i.e., questions they ask resource and referral organizations) versus what they say they do (their responses in an interview with the research team).

⁶ 75% of interviewees reported having children in child care. Detailed demographic information is in the Appendices about the interviewees as well as the families who asked child care questions of employees at the Children's Council and Wu Yee Children's Services.

Qualitative Research...

...like the interviews and diary study are about gaining insights into the lives of families who participated in the research. Insights help us understand the five phases of their child care journey (what happens before the process starts, discovering child care, comparing options, maintaining child care, and next steps) even if what happens in each phase may be unique to the family. Ultimately, the research findings are about understanding families' needs across their child care journey in order to better meet these needs.



Readers should repeatedly ask themselves, “What is a family trying to do (i.e., what is their need)? Where is this need happening within the five phases of their child care journey? What might address this need?”

We summarized what we learned about these families in two ways:

1. Six profiles of individuals who participated in the study. The profiles show families' child care journeys as being simple, straightforward and easy or frustrating, confusing and really challenging.
2. Four themes emerged from the interviews and the Diary Study that help explain what matters to families and why as they attempt to access and maintain child care.

Analysis of the data shed light on our participants' mental models of child care. People share “mental models”⁷ or beliefs, regardless if their views are true or not. Understanding the mental models of how families in this research think about child care can allow for improvements throughout the child care journey for many more families.

⁷ See strategies for using mental models: Jason Green, Building a Shared Mental Model to Rekindle Collaboration, Harvard Business Review, June 14, 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/06/building-a-shared-mental-model>.

Six Profiles of Low-Income Families' Experiences with the Subsidized Child Care Process



Profiles are interviewees' experiences with the child care process. Their names and photos have been changed to protect their identity in accordance with ethical research practices.

The first three Profiles offer examples of positive experiences with the child care journey. These families:

1. Didn't have to wait for child care.
2. Received individual attention ("high touch service") from a case manager.
3. Or they were familiar with the subsidized child care process **and** felt they had a guaranteed place to put their child, often at the same location where an older child was receiving child care.

The last three Profiles provide examples of negative experiences with the child care journey. These families:

1. Needed to repeat one or more phases of the process.
2. Felt they were being caught not complying rather than helped to comply.⁸
3. Didn't understand the child care process, the questions to ask, and how to elevate their concerns.

⁸ Christian Bason, Leading Public Sector Innovation, 2010:71, <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/L/bo13438419.html>.



J'hana

- 31 years old.
- Mother of 3, ages 2, 7 & 10.
- Graduated 10th grade.
- \$577/monthly household income.
- Lives in subsidized housing.
- On & off relationship with husband.
- He's emotionally abusive.
- Interviewed in English.

Child care is easy to find. There are four or five places near my home.

Before Starting Childcare Process

- Stayed with child for first 18 months then wanted to work.
- 2 older kids are in the same licensed family center.
- Knows how to navigate the CalWORKs/childcare system.

Discovery Phase (Becoming Aware & Finding Childcare)

- Continues receiving voucher payments from resource and referral organization, which administers the funds.
- Requests increased voucher payment from them for her third child.

Commit Phase (Compare Providers & Apply)

- No waitlist.
- No comparing providers.

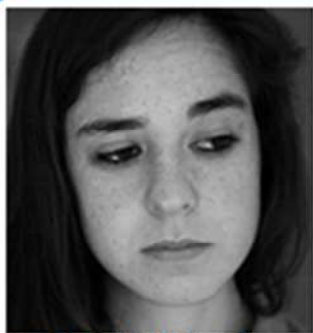
Success Phase (Onboarding & Maintaining)

- Put infant with two older siblings in the same place.
- No obstacles reported with childcare process.

Next Steps

- How might OECE help them to thrive moving forward?





Pilar

- 19 years old.
- Mother of an 8-month old.
- High school graduate.
- \$1,500/monthly household income.
- Child's father is living with them.
- Victim of trafficking.
- Has lived in U.S. for 2 years.
- Interviewed in Spanish.

Child care is easy to access, San Francisco has so many resources.

Before Starting Childcare Process

- Trying to adjust to U.S. life post-trafficking.
- Becomes pregnant in high school.

Discovery Phase (Becoming Aware & Finding Childcare)

- High school counselor and Teenage Pregnancy & Parenting Program (TAPP) case manager help her.
- Has childcare at Hilltop High School where she's graduated.

Commit Phase (Compare Providers & Apply)

- TAPP case manager helps her apply.
- Gets licensed center until Kindergarten.
- Takes CalWORKs exemption.
- Provider contacts her about child care opening, which she declines.
- No waitlist.

Success Phase (Onboarding & Maintaining)

- Has help from high school counselor & TAPP case manager.
- No obstacles reported with childcare process.

Next Steps

- How might OECE help them to thrive moving forward?





Qi

- 38 years old.
- Mother of a 3 year old.
- Completed the 8th grade.
- \$1,500/monthly household income.
- Lives in a studio.
- Was in a homeless shelter for 6 months with her child.
- Interviewed in Cantonese.

I'm satisfied with San Francisco child care.

Before Starting Childcare Process

- Transitional housing caseworker helps her enter the Accessible Childcare Expedited for the Shelter System (ACCESS) program.

Discovery Phase (Becoming Aware & Finding Childcare)

- ACCESS caseworker explains childcare process.

Commit Phase (Compare Providers & Apply)

- ACCESS caseworker clarifies options & helps her get center-based childcare until the age of 5.
- No waitlist.

Success Phase (Onboarding & Maintaining)

- ACCESS caseworker checks in on her child care.
- Through CalWORKs, she studies English & does job training.
- No obstacles reported with childcare process.

Next Steps

- How might OECE help them to thrive moving forward?





Image: Tika English, Flickr

Miramar

- 29 years old.
- Has 2 year old with special needs.
- Completed her AA. Doing BS degree.
- \$900/monthly household income.
- Cycles through jobs like her husband.
- Wants to cure cancer. It killed her dad.
- Interviewed in English.

Basically, you're on your own when it comes to child care in San Francisco.

Before Starting Childcare Process

- Learned about pregnancy 6 month into it.
- Mother-in-law (MiL) cared for child for 2 years.
- Didn't know he was special needs, but MiL felt she could no longer keep taking care of him.
- Gets on CalWORKs with husband.

Discovery Phase (Becoming Aware & Finding Childcare)

- Mom learns about one Resource & Referral Organization (RR)
- Searches providers on Yelp©.
- Still doesn't know child's special needs.

Commit Phase (Compare Providers & Apply)

- Finds licensed family provider thru Yelp©.
- Husband loses job then works for Uber© & RR stops paying voucher unless he is able to pick up child whenever not transporting people.
- He searches for another job, but can't find one in a week.
- That's all the time the provider gives them without a voucher.



Success Phase + Next Steps (Onboarding & Maintaining)

- They lose childcare spot before husband finds work at a gas station; misses old job, then gets depressed.
- Voucher payments resume.
- They find another licensed family provider on a list given to them by the 1st provider.
- They learn SFC3 would have held their child's spot.
- After 6 months, 2nd provider says child needs help.
- Mom's doctor points her to Golden Gate Regional that then directs her to SFUSD to have kid evaluated.
- After the evaluation, the child receives behavioral help in the mornings through SFUSD, but is not receiving formal learning to prepare for kindergarten.
- Mom wants to resume her studies in the fall and is struggling to find a provider to help with all her child's needs.
- How might OECE help?





Luz

- 27 years old who received asylum.
- Mother of 5- & 14-month old.
- Oldest child is in El Salvador.
- Completed high school.
- Has lived in the U.S. for 4 years.
- Experienced discrimination from employers.
- Interviewed in Spanish.

I couldn't pay for child care so I lost my job staying home with my baby.

Before Starting Childcare Process

- Started thinking about childcare shortly after giving birth in order to return to work.
- Housing is tough to find so she rents a room.

Discovery Phase (Becoming Aware & Finding Childcare)

- Her CalWORKs Employment Specialist referred her to one Resource & Referral (RR) organization.

Commit-Phase (Compare Providers & Apply)

- RR provided minimal info about provider options.
- Was on a waitlist for 3 months and never heard back from RR so found unlicensed provider for \$30/day.
- Voucher can't be used for this provider.



Success Phase + Next Steps (Onboarding & Maintaining)

- Can no longer pay for childcare so loses job.
- Is very worried because she only trusts this provider since she's seen nannies mistreat others' children.
- How might OECE help?





Betty

- 62-year-old great-grandmother.
- Raising 3-year-old great-grandchild.
- Lives in subsidized housing off of Social Security Income (SSI).
- \$797/monthly household income.
- Children and great-grandchild attended the same child care center.
- Interviewed in English.

I waited 3 years for child care and no one helped me.

Before Starting Childcare Process

- Guardian of the child whom she kept home until the age 1.
- Wanted him in childcare to learn words, numbers, colors, to socialize and be independent.

Discovery Phase (Becoming Aware & Finding Childcare)

- A child care center is walking distance from her home.

Commit Phase (Compare Providers & Apply)

- Submitted application this center and never received any contact for two years.
- Followed up three times and told to wait.
- Never heard of centralized waiting list.
- Sees other children at this child care center graduate to kindergarten.
- Submits application to same center where her children went.
- Waited for year.

Success Phase + Next (Onboarding & Maintaining)

- Child is now there.
- After three months at the child care center, he has learned so much.
- She received no help navigating the child care process.
- How might OECE help them moving forward?

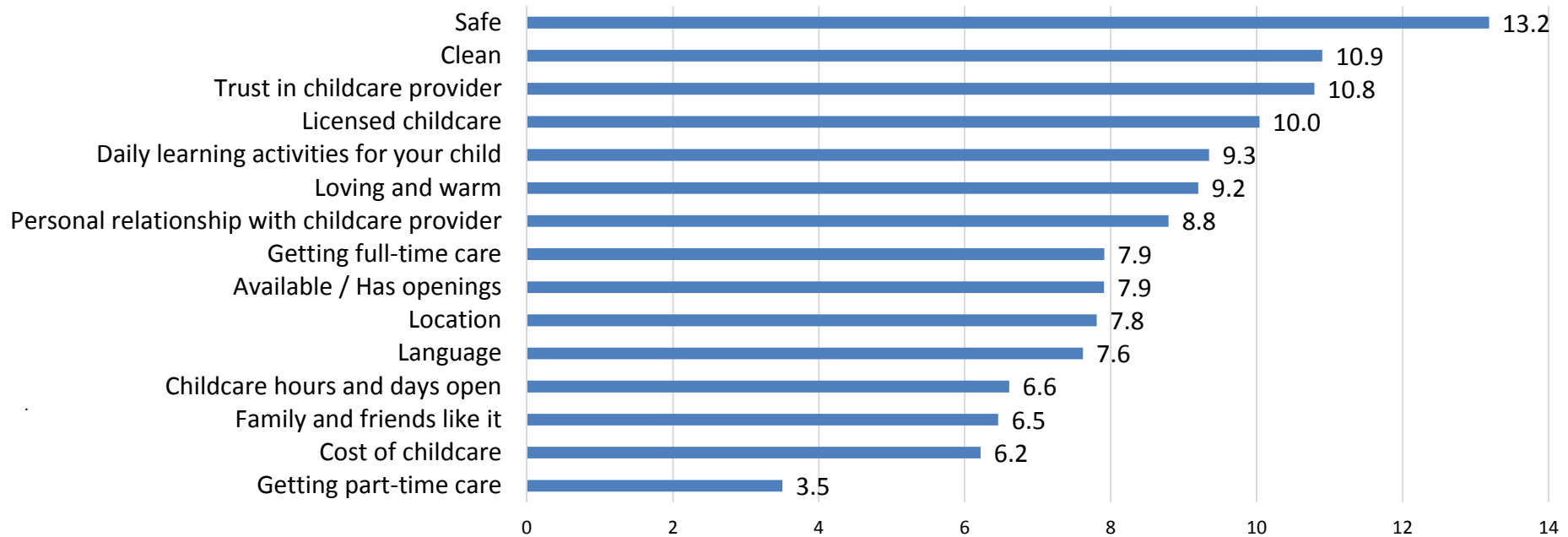


How Do Families Make Their Child Care Decisions?

Interviewees received slips of paper with 15 criteria for choosing child care (e.g., safe, clean, etc.). These criteria were based on child care research and input from OECE employees. We asked interviewees to review the reasons and add anything they felt missing, which only three interviewees did (see [page 35](#) for details).⁹

Then they put the slips of paper in order with most important to them at the top and least at the bottom. The 15 criteria can be further ranked into four groups: (1st) Physical and emotional wellbeing of child, (2nd) emotional wellbeing of parent/guardian, (3rd) learning/education of child, and (4th) logistics.

Average Ranked Importance of 15 Criteria for Choosing Child Care



⁹ Scores calculated by first assigning a point value to each factor (15=most important, 14=Second most important...1=least important) and taking the average score for each factor across participants. A score of 15 would reflect a factor that was ranked the most important across all participants.

What Does “Quality” Child Care Mean to Families?¹⁰

Interviewees provided multiple responses to this question. We grouped the responses into three categories: education (21), safety (11) and general (11). Categories and examples are below:

Education:

- Social or Cultural Learning of Children: manners & potty training.
- Children Learning Numbers, Colors and Other Words: strong curriculum & ready for Kindergarten.
- Process of Learning: play-based programs & lots of activities.
- Physical Space: outdoors playgrounds & lots of physical space.
- Teachers: have degrees & are patient.

Safety:

- Wellbeing of Child: not physically hurt & care for kids.
- Wellbeing of Parent/Guardian: trustworthy providers.
- Physical Space: clean & bright environment.

General:

- Good Providers: meet child’s individual needs & don’t do it for the money.
- Logistics: process for child care is straightforward & child care location is close to home.



¹⁰ 93% of interviewees answered this question. Most provided multiple responses.

What are the obstacles families experience to access and maintain subsidized child care?

Because families experience obstacles throughout the process, we adapted here a generic process people experience when trying to access just about any service:¹¹



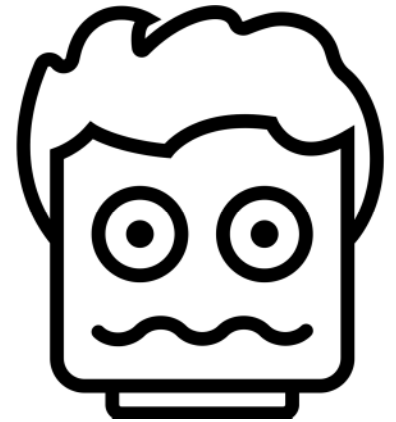
We consider parents' and guardians' worries about child care, presented on the following page, as potential obstacles throughout this process.

¹¹ See additional examples here: James Kalbach, Mapping Experiences, Figure 3-10, 2016, <http://shop.oreilly.com/product/0636920038870.do?sortby=publicationDate>.

Underlying All Phases: What worries families throughout the child care process?

Safety & Trust:

- Worry about news of children being raped and killed in child care.
- Concern about sexual abuse of child since it occurred by a previous provider.
- Seeing nannies treat other children poorly and fretting about one's own child.
- Fear of child being stabbed with a pencil by a classmate, which happened to a family member.
- Anxious child will end up like nephew who didn't get child care, wasn't taught well, and has troubles talking today.
- Experiencing physical or emotional abuse personally or in one's home.



Homelessness/Personal Finance:

- Becoming homeless.
- Not having CalWORKs provide financial support for child care while looking for housing or when trying to continue therapy sessions.
- Dealing with losing financial support for child care once their child turns a certain age.

Phase 1: What obstacles do families experience before starting the child care process?



Not Knowing:

- Which documents are needed to get child care.
- That there is a centralized waiting list and how it may help their 1 year old.

Waiting:

- Applying for CalWORKs and having the approval process take four months because they keep saying the client's paperwork hasn't been turned in when the client says it has been.
- Wanting child care ASAP and being told by a resource and referral (R&R) organization that twin 2-year-old boys need to be on a waitlist for 5 – 6 months in order to first turn 3.

Logistics/Policies:

- Balancing doctor's appointments for a premature child with trying to start the child care application process was too overwhelming so the parent kept the child at home.
- Being required to first find fulltime work then get fulltime care, but how can parents find that job without child care coming first?

Trust:

- Being distrustful of any potential provider.
- Putting son in child care before he can talk/say something is a problem because the child can't inform the parent if there is an issue with his child care.

Phase 2: What obstacles do families experience when becoming aware and finding child care?

Not Knowing:

- The right questions to ask since the entire subsidized child care process is a mystery.
- The right type of child care to meet child's special needs?
- How to get subsidized child care, and needing a friend or family member to take the parent to a resource and referral (R&R) organization.
- The right social media platforms to use.

Waiting:

- Parent provides child's information to an R&R then waits, assuming the R&R will find the provider.



Phase 3: What obstacles do families experience when comparing and applying for child care?



Providers & Parents Not Aligned:

- The centralized waiting list kept calling the mom to say they found openings for the 3 year old but they never called about the 4 year old or to find a place where the two could be together.
- Can't find one school for the 3 year old and 6 year old.
- Getting called for openings for the youngest child (3 years old) but not the oldest (also 3, and born prematurely).

Inconsistent Service:

- Grandmother watched parent's two older kids and received payment as a licensed exempt provider. Parent gives birth again, and wanted grandmother to take care of the child, but the payment agency denied her request stating grandmother failed background check. The agency later notified parent it made a mistake and parent didn't like this agency's service so doesn't return.
- Repeatedly calling a child care provider to have fourth child join siblings and not receiving any returned calls.

Provider List Is Not User-Friendly:

- A provider list with missing or unclear information, specifically (1) numbers to call, (2) website to visit, (3) explanation how to make and escalate complaints about providers, (4) details about providers' fees/costs, (5) whether and how a parent can have one-on-one time with the provider, and (6) the provider's current and future openings.

Waiting:

- Waiting for one or more openings at a preferred location, sometimes for 3 years.

Phase 4: What obstacles do families experience when onboarding and maintaining child care?



Financial Struggles:

- Paying the fees and the child's meals at child care can be expensive.
- Having family member receive \$4/hour to watch a child is not enough so the parent has to pay this person more.
- Paying child's father to watch kid and for his transportation.
- Mom had her mother watch her child and her mother received payments as a licensed exempt provider. But when she learned that her mother would have to pay taxes on those payments, she stopped them immediately.

Requirements:

- Needing to be in school 58 hours a week for full-time care for two kids, making it difficult to work.
- Submitting paystubs to CalWORKs, work schedules to another agency and finally class schedules and grades to a third agency
- Wanting to work, but feeling penalized for doing so because as household income increases the family doesn't get free or subsidized child care. It's hard for them to get ahead.
- Parents want full-time daycare for 3 year old, but payment agency said because they each are home one-day a week it wasn't possible to get full-time care. Parents explained their off day varies weekly so they don't know when they will be home, and complained to the California Department of Education in Sacramento. Family got full-time care, but their monthly fee went from \$290 to \$400.

Safety:

Infant daughter vomited after mom gets her from the first day of child care so she left the provider.

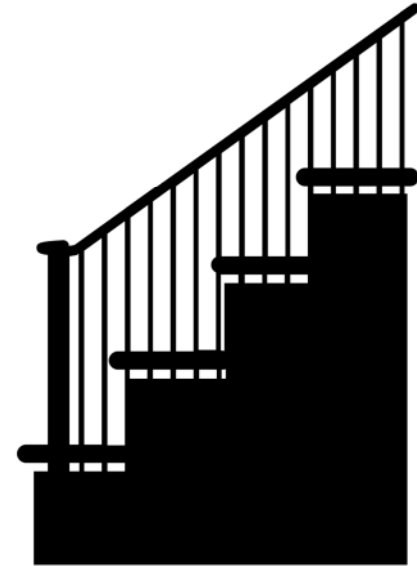
Phase 5: What obstacles do families experience regarding their next steps in the child care process?

Preparing for Kindergarten:

- Wanting the provider to help her 3 year old with potty training or to find help another way as the child won't be able to enroll in a child care center until potty trained.
- Educational resources and support to help prepare children for preschool and kindergarten.

Helping Special Needs Children:

- Children with special needs or who experience trauma may require additional resources to meet existing or future needs as they grow.



Why don't families who receive CalWORKs (cash aid and/or job training) use their child care voucher?

Eight different families told us why. Their experiences are grouped here into four categories with an example.

Lack of Steady, Safe Work:

- A mother shared how she lasted two days at a candy factory where multiple coworkers passed out because it was so hot. No one cared for them or her when she felt lightheaded. She shared how her child care voucher stops when a parent's job ends even if the working situation is unbearable. The parent's neighbor is a licensed family care provider who's flexible with late payments and pick up times.

Mistrust & Physical Abuse:

- A mother on CalWORKs with two children reported that her eldest was sexually assaulted in child care. As a result, she decided to stay home with her youngest child for two years.

Emotional Abuse:

- A mother described how the father of her child would need to pay child support in order for her to receive the voucher for subsidized child care. Because of this policy, she doesn't want him to pay because he's emotionally abusive, and she suggested this abuse would worsen if she had him pay her child support.

Unfamiliar or Frustrated with Child Care Process

- An immigrant mother said she did not know what documents would be needed to access child care. Another mother said she encountered a problem trying to get a family member approved to care for her child, and that she did not like how she was treated by the agency working on the approval.

“How Might We...?” Questions

“How might we...?” questions¹² are a useful Human-Centered Design tool to expand possible recommendations in this report. Several of these questions are below to spur ideas for next steps:

How might we...

1. ...design services to help families to comply rather than catch/penalize families for not complying?
2. ...use the mental association of child care as place of safety and/or education to assist the way families assess providers?
3. ...help families to understand the child care application, onboarding and maintenance process, their and others’ roles and responsibilities, a timeline for how things may unfold, and whom to call with questions, concerns and follow up information?
4. ...use a family-centered checklist to parents and guardians ask questions, prepare needed documents, and understand the required steps in their child care journey, and where they are in this journey at any given time?
5. ...create a warm handoff for parents in the CalWORKs lobby to get child care or find other options for help with their needs, including therapy and housing/shelter?
6. ...inform parents that they may receive subsidized child care or after school programs past the age of 3?
7. ...design the child care process to increase trust in providers? (e.g., would using apps that monitor/live stream children in child care help?)
8. ...assist parents to evaluate the providers’ educational environment (book learning and behavioral/social skill learning).
9. ...help parents in physically or emotionally abusive relationships?
- 10....widen the possibilities for how to reduce or eliminate the waitlist (or “need list” as a provider once said)?
- 11....clarify for families how much increasing their household income will increase their family fee? Perhaps an interactive infographic on a website?
- 12....applying the findings from the Diary Study ([p. 33-34](#)) to improve service delivery to clients?

¹² See more details from Warren Berger, The Secret Phrase Top Innovators Use, Harvard Business Review, September 17, 2012, <https://hbr.org/2012/09/the-secret-phrase-top-innovato>.

Appendices

Diary Study: Questions Clients Asked about Early Care and Education (ECE) at Wu Yee Children's Services and The Children's Council

Overview:

Because there is a difference between what people say and do, we wanted to know what questions people have about ECE by hearing what they ask. So we requested employees from Wu Yee Family Services and the Children's Council who work with the public to document the questions they get. Documentation occurred at the discretion of these employees after helping someone. They submitted the data into an online form over a three-week period in November 2016. No personal identifying information was included about the person they served, the employee or where they work. Excerpts are on the following page.

Responses: 53 responses combined from Wu Yee and Children's Council.

Relationship to child(ren):

- 44 mothers (83%)
- 5 fathers (11%)
- 1 Grandparent
- 3 others (case manager, advocate in hospital, and unknown)

Language of interaction:

- 32 English (60%)
- 13 Cantonese (25%)
- 8 Spanish (15%)

Mode of communication

- 20 in-person (38%)
- 33 via phone (62%)

Major Themes: (Note: some families asked multiple questions, creating more than one theme)

- 22 were seeking information about ECE options, with 5 of those specifically seeking information about preschool options and 2 of them seeking information for children with special needs.
- 19 were seeking information about the centralized waiting list, with 9 of those specifically seeking information on their status on the wait list.
- 15 were seeking information about financial assistance for ECE.
- 7 were seeking information about other social services in addition to ECE, such as free diapers, employment support, parent resources, housing, and food assistance.
- 2 were seeking better child care options than their current arrangement. Both of them were Cantonese speakers.
- These themes were created by 7 Cantonese speakers, 5 English speakers and 2 Spanish speakers.

Other Patterns of Note:

- 3 referred to receiving or qualifying for “Children’s Council” as though it were a funding source.
- 3 were new to SF and/or considering moving and wanted to know how moving would impact their current financial assistance for ECE services.
- 2 mentioned trying to find care for two children (siblings) under 3.

Recommendations: How might OECE...

- 1) Help parents understand how the centralized eligibility list works?
- 2) Provide updates to families about their status/expected wait time?
- 3) Offer user friendly information about existing financial assistance for ECE, including eligibility?
- 4) Work with resource and referral (R&R) organizations to connect & screen families for multiple social services beyond child care.
- 5) Help siblings to be enrolled in the same program when requested by families.
- 6) Brand public subsidies in outreach materials, including the website, to help the public contact the Office on Early Care and Education when needed?

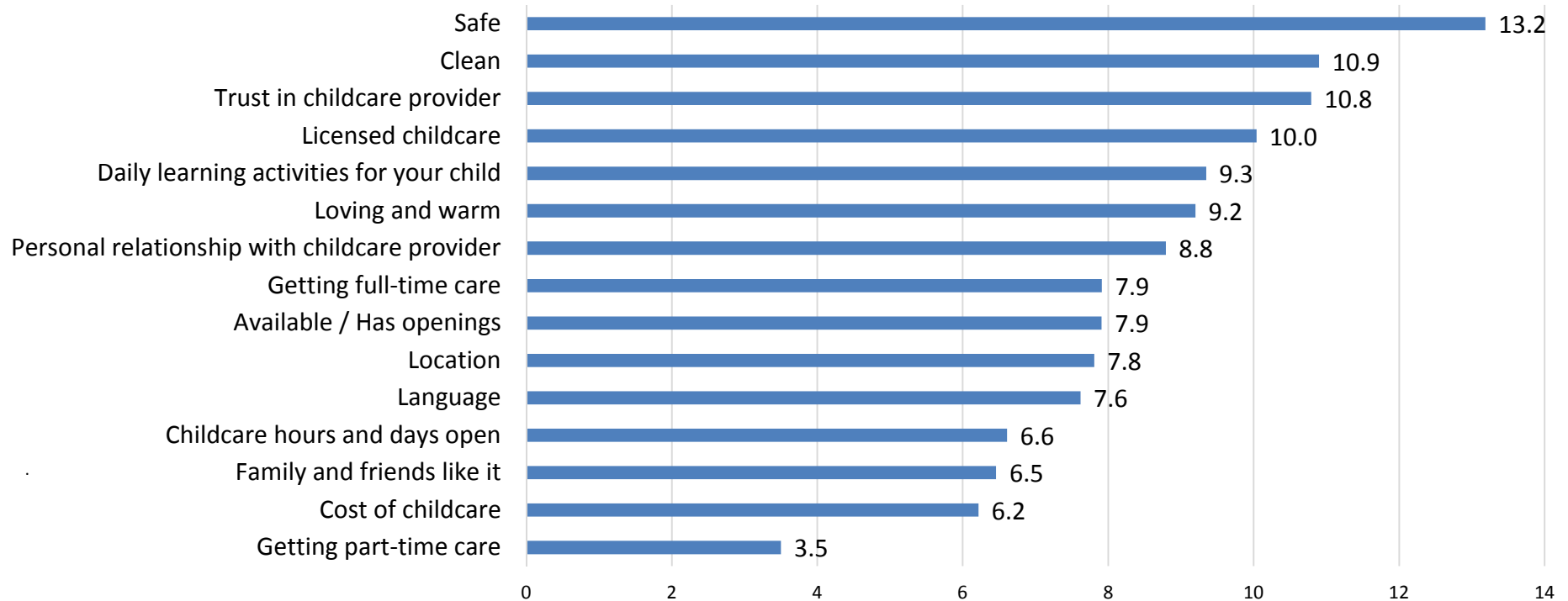
Financial Assistance:

- “Twin boys turning 2 years and mom would like to know how to start care with financial help. Mom attends school full-time. She gets part-time care now and asks neighbor's help for the other times. She will watch the neighbor's kids when she is free. She really needs full-time care for the twins so that she can focus on school.”
- “Lots of confusion surrounding funding and which program her children qualify for. Her 3 year old qualifies for Bridge and she found a provider who can accept him and 1 year old daughter but there is no funding for 1 year old until they turn 3. The provider was confused herself because the parent told her that she had Children's Council, however, it turns out that she was actually just on SF3C. Parent will have to either separate her children or continue search for site that accepts and has funding for both.”
- “I found a preschool near my home and they have a spot for my child. They said they take Children's Council payment. Can you pay for us?”
- “My mom is helping me now, but she needs to work too. I have a friend who’s having her mom take care of her baby and her mom gets paid by Children's Council. Do I qualify for that program? My baby is so little now and I don't want him to go to any daycare programs. I only trust my mom to take care of him. I really need the funding because I still go to school and I can't afford to pay my mom to take care of my boy.”

Waiting List:

- “I want to work, but I need child care. When will my child get selected for this service? Some of my friends have a similar family situation and they have had free child care, why not me?”
- “A mom called the resource and referral line and said she received a call saying that there is a child care offer for her. I explained that she needs to call the SF3C line and speak to an SF3C staff for a prescreening. Mom said she already did, but has not heard back and she doesn't want to miss the deadline. What can she do? Mom said they have been waiting for a year and finally got selected for a subsidized offer. She was very excited about the offer and planned to find a full-time job.”
- “Looking for child care for 2 year old. The mother previously did not reactivate her account because child care took too long and she was only offered slots too far from home.”
- “I have a new born and signed him up online. I want to check the status. The website said I'll get a call but I never hear anything.”
- “Signed up on SF3C in September, and didn't hear anything yet. It has been 4 months since I signed up, how much longer do I need to wait?”

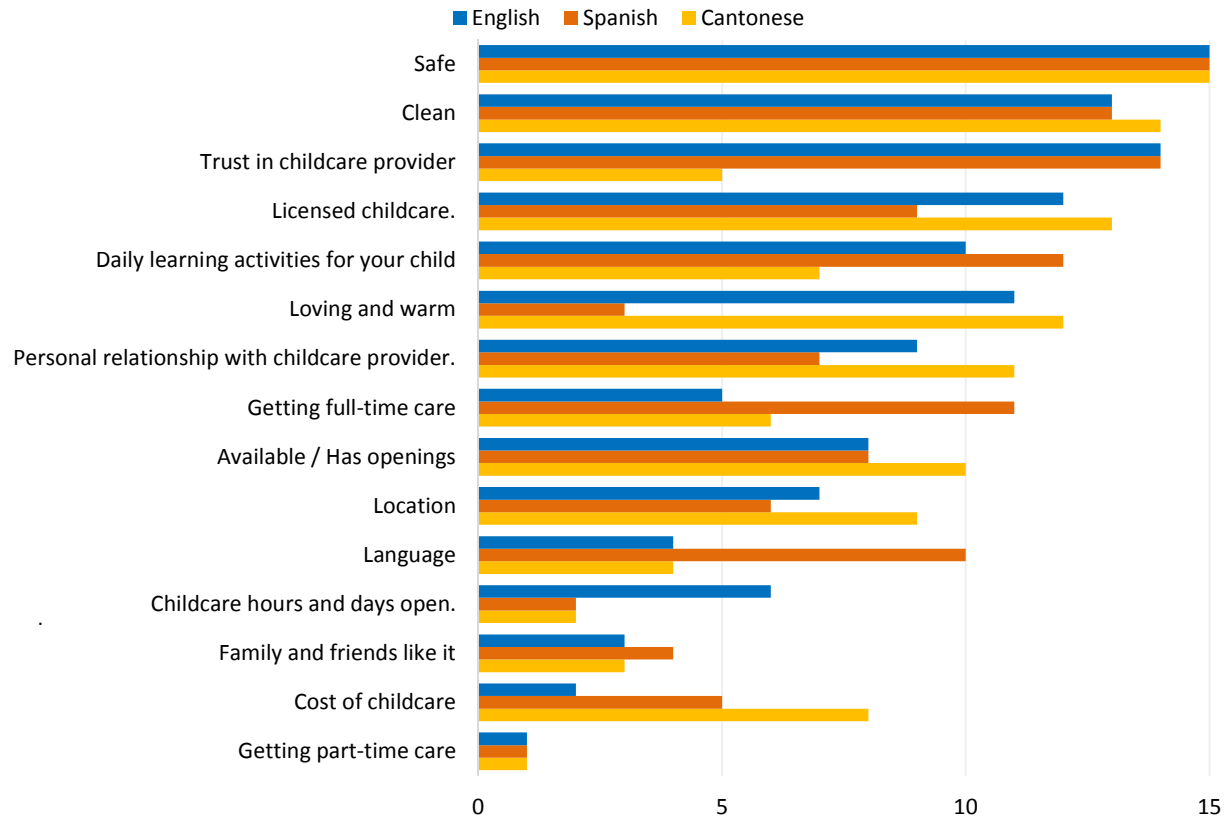
How Families Make Their Child Care Decisions Based on 15 Criteria



Notes

- 1) Scores calculated by first assigning a point value to each factor (15=most important, 14=Second most important...1=least important) and taking the average score for each factor across participants. A score of 15 here would reflect a factor that was ranked the most important across all participants.
- 2) If a participant did not rank all factors, unranked factors are given a *missing* value for that participant and do not impact that factor's average score. The remaining ranked factors are still assigned values (15=most important, 14=second most important, etc.), but the lowest ranked factors' point value will be a function of the amount of factors that weren't ranked.
- 3) If a factor was ranked multiple times (likely a data entry error), the highest value of that factor is kept.
- 4) Participants had the option of writing in and ranking criteria that weren't included. These criteria are excluded from this analysis. Write-in criteria included "Outdoor activities", "App on phone to live stream the child care center/child", "Daycare on weekends", "Prizes for kids", and "Night time care center".

Importance of Criteria Considered When Selecting Child Care by Primary Language

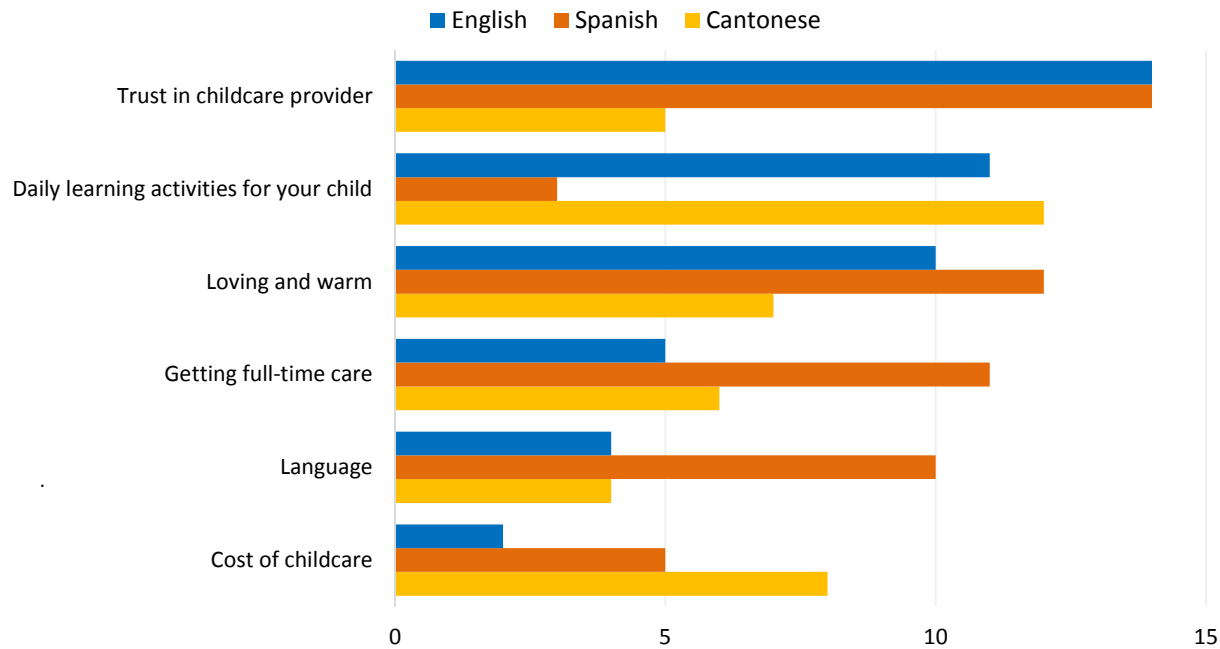


Notes

1) Scores calculated by assigning a point value based on average score for each factor across participants.

2) 15=highest average, 1=lowest average; assigning a point value to each factor (15=most important, 1=least important)

Importance of Criteria Considered When Selecting Child Care by Primary Language



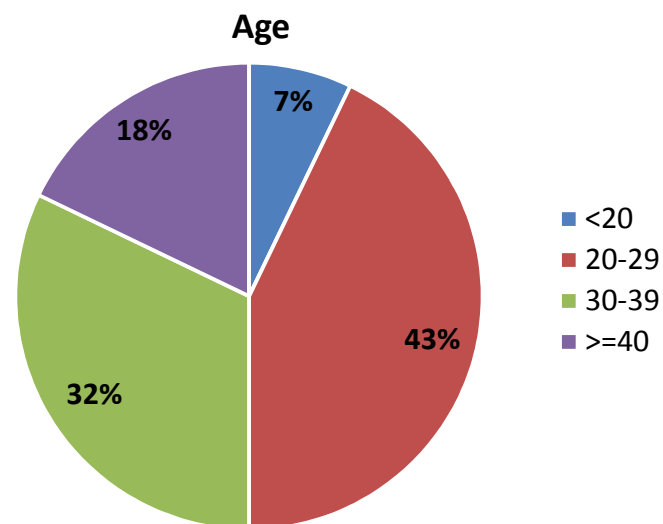
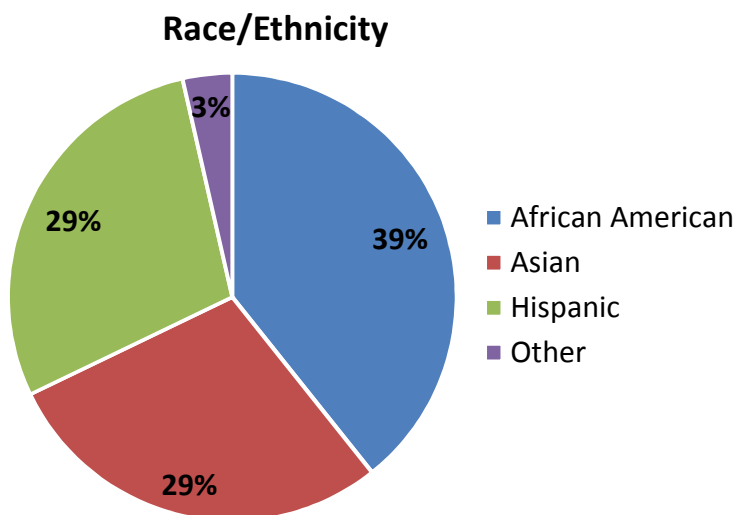
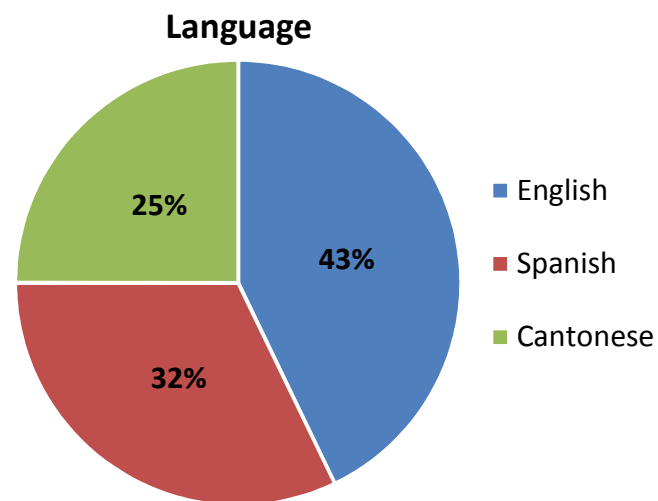
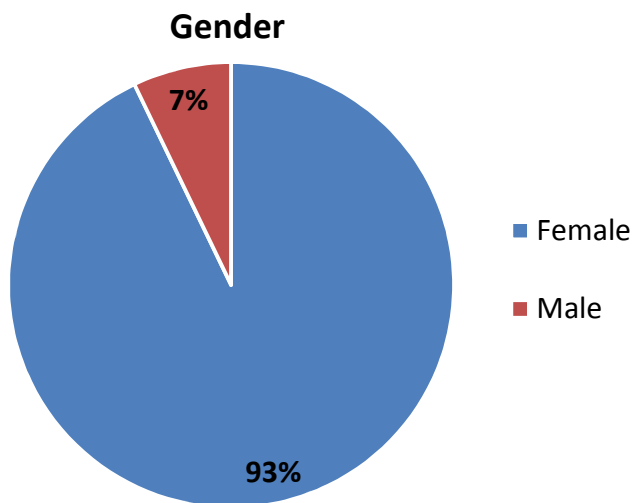
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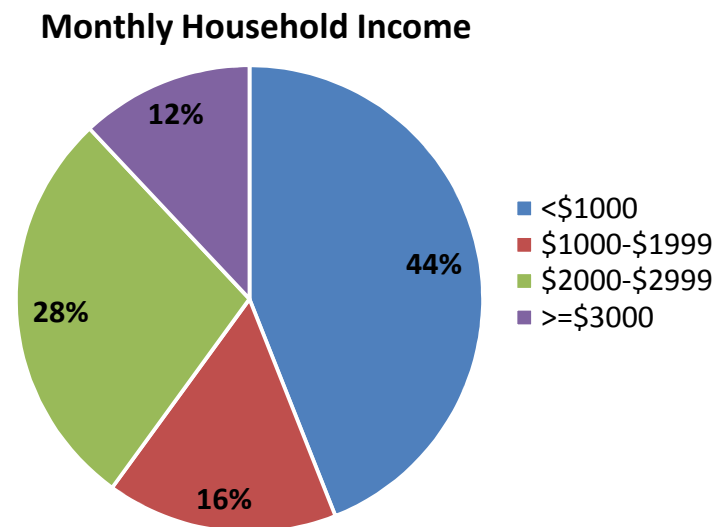
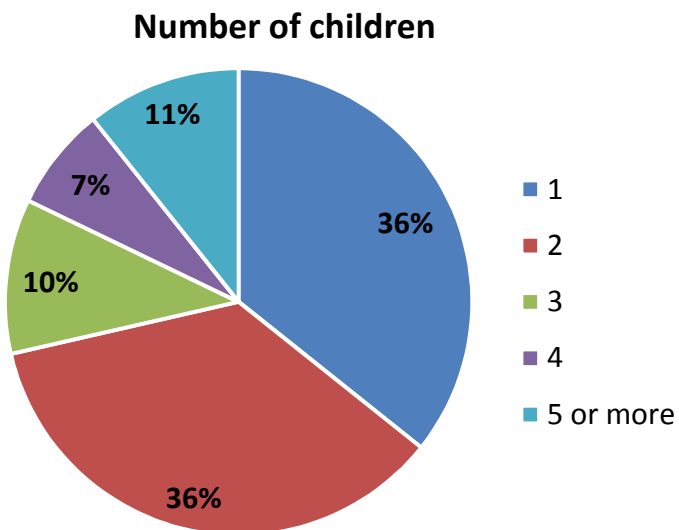
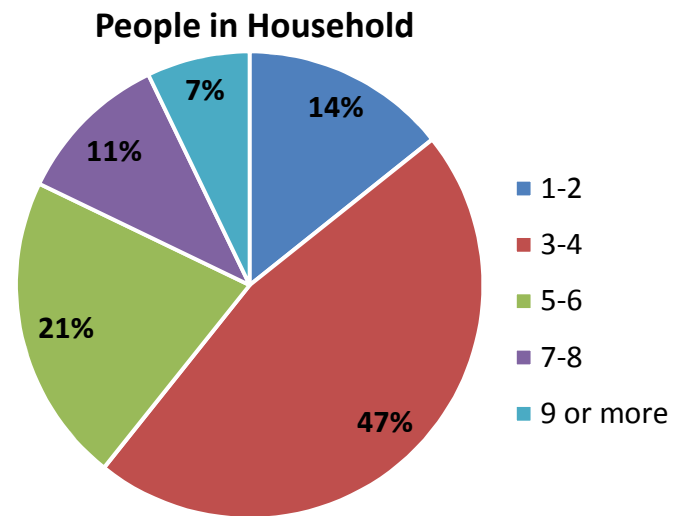
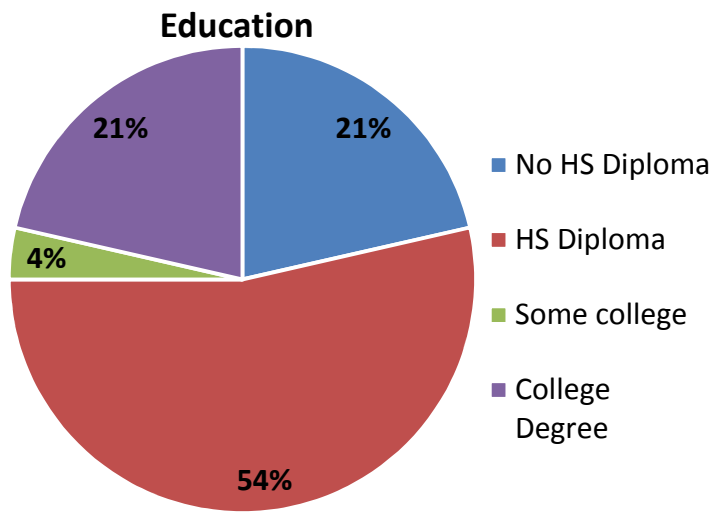
- 1) Scores calculated by assigning a point value based on average score for each factor across participants (15=highest average, 1=lowest average).
- 2) Only factors which had a difference of at least 5 between two or more of the language groups are included.

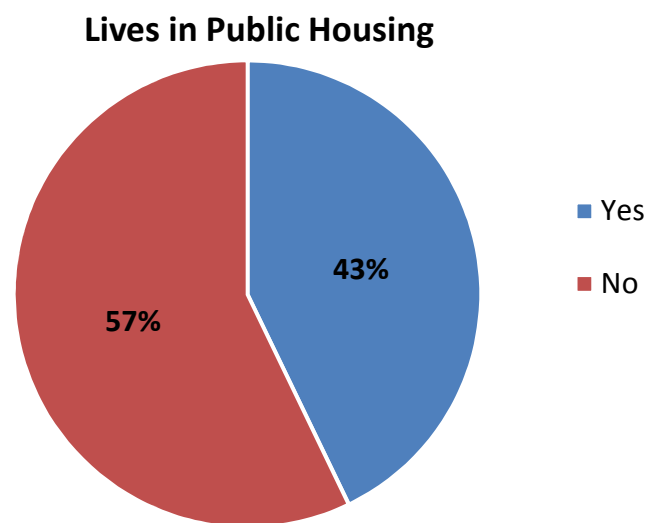
Demographic Data of the Interviewed Research Participants

	Total #	%	English #	%	Spanish #	%	Cantonese #	%
Total	28	100%						
(1) Language								
English	12	43%	12					
Spanish	9	32%			9			
Cantonese	7	25%					7	
Gender								
Female	26	93%	11	92%	8	89%	7	100%
Male	2	7%	1	8%	1	11%	-	-
Age								
<20	2	7%	-	-	2	22%		7%
20-29	12	43%	7	58%	4	44%	1	43%
30-39	9	32%	4	33%	2	22%	3	32%
>=40	5	18%	1	8%	1	11%	3	18%
(2)Race/Ethnicity								
African American	11	39%	10	83%	1	11%	-	-
Asian	8	29%	-	-	1	11%	7	100%
Hispanic	8	29%	1	8%	7	78%	-	-
Other	1	4%	1	8%	-	-	-	-
(2) Education Level								
No HS Diploma	6	21%	4	33%	1	11%	1	14%
HS Diploma	15	54%	7	58%	5	56%	3	43%
Some college	1	4%	-	-	1	11%	-	-
College Degree	6	21%	1	8%	2	22%	3	43%
Household Size								
1-2	4	14%	1	8%	2	22%	1	14%
3-4	13	46%	5	42%	5	56%	3	43%
5-6	6	21%	4	33%	-	-	2	29%
7-8	3	11%	2	17%	1	11%	-	-
9 or more	2	7%		0%	1	11%	1	14%
# of children								
1	10	36%	3	25%	5	56%	2	29%
2	10	36%	4	33%	3	33%	3	43%
3	3	11%	1	8%	1	11%	1	14%
4	2	7%	1	8%	-	-	1	14%
5 or more	3	11%	3	25%	-	-	-	-
(3)Monthly income								
<\$1000	11	44%	6	55%	2	29%	3	43%
\$1000-\$1999	4	16%	1	9%	2	29%	1	14%
\$2000-\$2999	7	28%	4	36%	3	43%	-	-
>=\$3000	3	12%	-	-	-	-	3	43%
Public Housing								
Yes	12	43%	10	83%	2	22%	-	-
No	16	57%	2	17%	7	78%	7	100%

-
- (1) If multiple languages spoken at home listed, the language other than English included. One participant spoke Spanish and Burmese at home, and Spanish is the language listed here.
- (2) Participant labeled “other” is bi-racial Asian and African American.
- (3) 2 Associates, 3 Bachelors and 1 Masters degrees included in “College Degree” category.
- (4) 3 participants did not report monthly income.







Positive Feedback about Child Care from Interviewees

While much of this report is dedicated to identifying and removing obstacles in the subsidized child care process that families experience, we recognize the hard work of employees at OECE, HSA and community partners that produce positive results & feedback for San Franciscans.¹³ Here's a sample:¹⁴

- “All the government support is so helpful.”
- Grateful that my premature born son’s learning is now on track with his peers. He likes his preschool and asks me to read to him.
- “Good news [that both girls are at the same school]”
- “[Child care is] helpful [...] parents are looking for a job to survive.”
- Accessible because there’s a lot of resources for families.
- My CalWORKs social worker helped me find child care in 3-4 months, ten minutes from my home.
- I’m very happy with my Family Services Specialist at the [R&R].
- The [R&R] was helpful, nice and provided me with a referral list. The list was nice because they filtered it based on my needs and included in-home providers.
- I had a great experience with [the R&R], and wasn’t on a waitlist.
- [R&R] staff helped me through the process.
- [R&R] was very helpful.
- Easy to find [because my Treatment Access Program/TAP case manager helped me].
- I’m so lucky.
- I’m satisfied with my child care.
- Child care is easy to find since my other kids all go to the same place.

¹³ We also recognize the important research and results of positive psychology. See John E. Michel and Andreas Neuman, Positive Psychology as a Catalyst for Change, Harvard Business Review, November 2010 Issue, <https://hbr.org/2010/11/web-exclusive-positive-psychology-as-a-catalyst-for-change>.

¹⁴ Some members on the research team used quotation marks, and other did not, explaining the inconsistency in their above usage.

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Healthy Generations Project

HOPE SF

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