

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

**Louisiana Parents, Work, and the
Struggle for Affordable Child Care**

Statewide Report Findings: November 7 - 27, 2024





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You can find this report and additional information at www.policyinstitutela.org.

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OVERVIEW

The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children (LPIC), with partners, began surveying Louisiana parents with young children in 2020 as part of a larger effort to understand the impact of COVID-19 on families and child care in Louisiana. This now annual survey of Louisiana parents with children under the age of 5 focuses on their child care arrangements, including their needs and experiences related to child care.

Nearly 10,000 independent child care businesses across the state employ over 15,000 employees and support tens of thousands of additional employees across all industries by providing early education to their young children. Yet, in 2024, Louisiana’s child care landscape continues to face significant challenges. While the need for child care remains high — more than 7,000 children on the Child Care Assistance Program waitlist and nearly 100,000 in-need but unserved birth to 3-year-olds — resources struggle to meet the demand. These challenges come amidst ongoing economic pressures, including persistent inflation and the rising costs of doing business, such as increased insurance premiums and workforce competition for qualified early educators.

Rising industry costs, coupled with decreased state and federal investment, have a multiplier effect. Providers are forced to increase tuition costs to offset increasing operation costs, and the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) cannot enroll eligible families. These realities leave empty seats in child care centers and unrealized talent in our economy as working parents struggle to find and afford the high costs of early childhood education programs.

With the majority of children under 5-years-old in Louisiana having all available parents in the workforce, one of the state’s essential economic drivers is the child care sector, as it supports and sustains numerous other industries. The lack of sustainable and substantial investments in early childhood education programs leaves working Louisiana families in a precarious position — they struggle to access and afford the high-quality child care they need to participate in the workforce, and that their children need for a strong start to life.



SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

This survey provides insights into the continued needs and challenges of families with young children in Louisiana.

Parents of young children in Louisiana can only work or attend school if they can access child care.



In this year's survey, most responding parents:

- » Worked or attended school full-time outside the home.
- » Relied on child care for at least 30 hours a week to work or attend school.
- » Stated they would not be able to work without consistent child care.
- » Paid for child care independently without any form of public subsidy (e.g. CCAP).
- » Worried about their family's ability to afford basic needs and the cost of child care.
- » Had lost time at work in the last three months because of a child care disruption.

Child care costs continue to be a significant concern and burden for parents.

- » On average, parents reported spending \$633 per child per month on child care or \$7,600 per year. **For a family with two children in care, that translates to more than \$15,000 per year.**
- » For families paying for child care and not receiving any form of subsidized care report their average cost per child was \$1,183 a month for child care, or more than \$14,000 per year. **For a family with two children in child care, that translates to more than \$28,000 per year.**
- » **A majority of families worried about being able to afford essential costs**, including child care, along with housing and utilities.
- » One-third of respondents who did not receive any form of subsidized care were dissatisfied with the cost of their current child care arrangement.
- » **Child care is a burdensome expense for families.** A majority of parents making \$150,000 or less per year said they were worried about being able to afford the cost of child care.

Many parents lack the child care needed to be able to work and provide for their families.

- » **Child care enables parents to work.** More than 70% of parents reported they could not work without a reliable child care arrangement for their children.
- » **Parents also rely on child care throughout the workday.** Nearly all responding parents (90%) relied on child care for at least some part of the weekday workday (the hours of 6 am to 6 pm each day) and 76% of parents needed child care for at least 30 hours per week.
- » Even with their current child care arrangements in place, **many parents still lack the care they need throughout the workday.** Almost 70% of parents stated they had to take at least one day off of work in the last three months due to a child care disruption.

7 out of 10 parents say they could not work without reliable child care.



Finding the child care support needed is still a challenge for many families.

- » Over 10% of parents were dissatisfied with their current child care arrangement and **22% said it was difficult for them to find their child care arrangement.**
- » Nearly half (45%) of parents found their current child care arrangement based on the recommendation of a friend, family member, other parent, or neighbor.
- » Ease of use and convenience are the main determining factors for parents, as **43% indicated they chose their provider based on hours available and 41% based on the location's convenience.**

Investing in the Workforce of Today and Tomorrow

Louisiana's working families depend on accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care to participate in the workforce, support their families, and contribute to the state's economy. Access to high-quality early childhood education also supports the future workforce, our children, who will be more likely to succeed at school and in life. To ensure our economy is able to realize this two-generational impact, Louisiana should:

- » **Prioritize long-term investment** in early childhood systems by continuing to invest state general funds into the Child Care Assistance Program and establish additional dedicated funding streams for the Early Childhood Education Fund in order to ensure consistent and sustainable support for working families and local funding efforts.
- » **Incentivise businesses and employers** to contribute towards child care costs for their employees and local workforce to ensure maximized economic productivity.
- » **Establish pathways for young adults** to enter the early childhood field through Fast Forward and Jump Start programs, apprenticeship programs, and scholarships to create a robust early childhood educator supply and meet the child care demands of working parents.

SURVEY FINDINGS

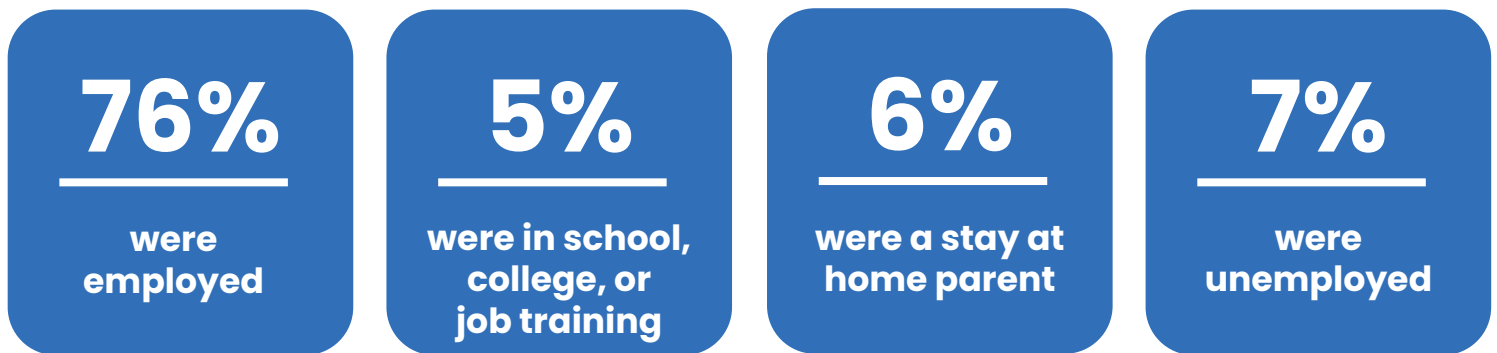
Louisiana parents could not work or attend school without child care.

More than 80% of responding parents worked or attended school.

- » Over 70% worked or attended school full-time; 81% worked or attended school at least part-time. An additional 7% were unemployed but looking for work – something they could not do without child care.

Figure 1:

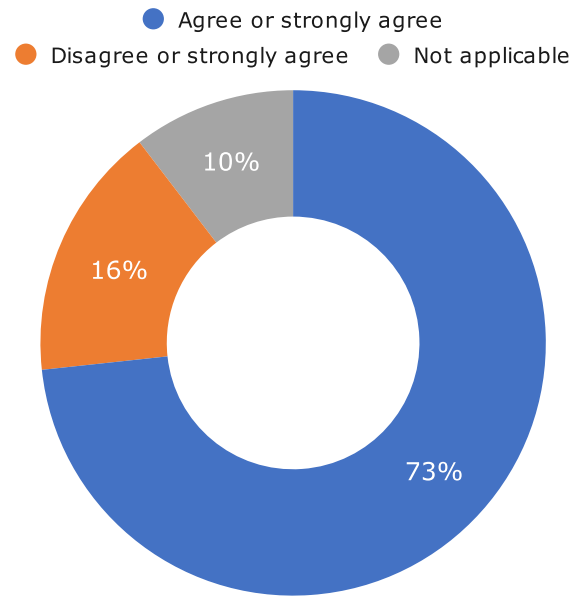
Work or School Situation of Responding Parents



Nearly 75% of respondents agreed that they would be unable to work or attend school without consistent child care.

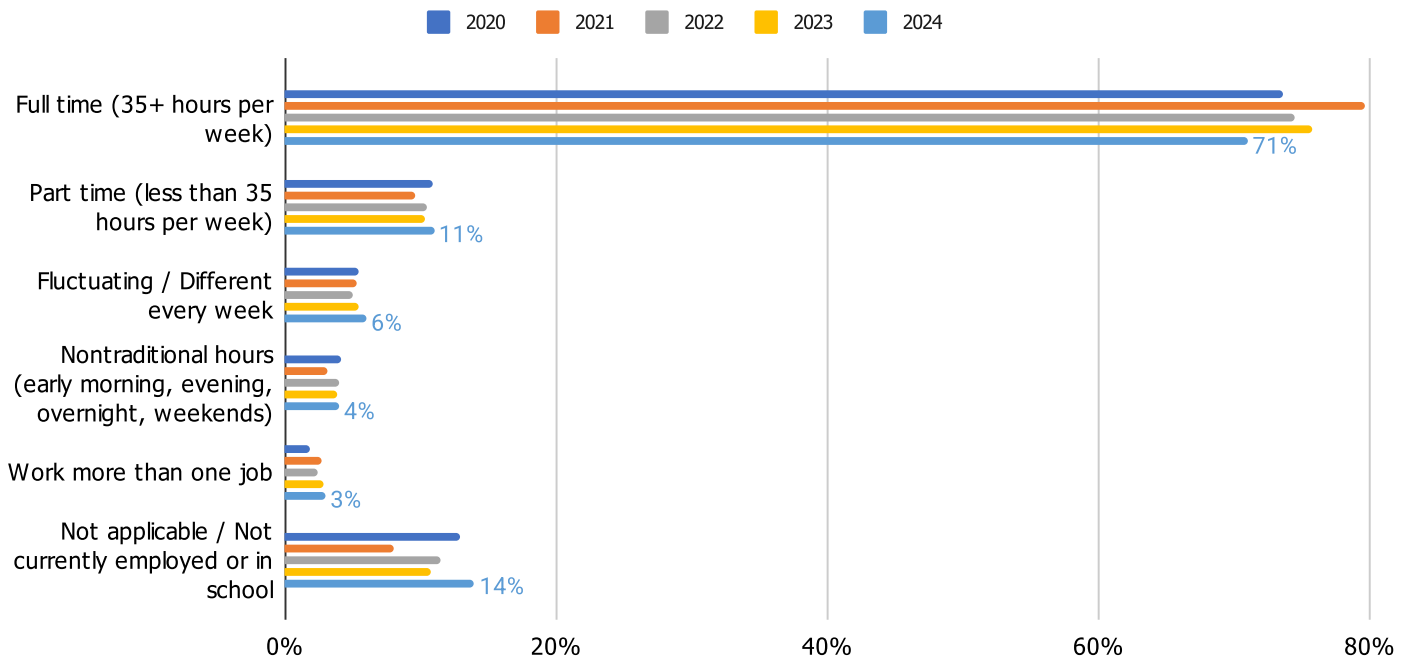
- » This was true across all income brackets: more than 70% of respondents making above \$20,000 a year said they would not be able to work or attend school without consistent child care; 80% of respondents in the highest income range (making more than \$150,000 a year) agreed with the statement, the highest of any bracket
- » Over 40% of respondents also said they struggled to work or attend school when they do not have child care. This was a particularly acute issue for families making \$100,000 or less per year in income.

Figure 2: Majority of Parents Agree Consistent Child Care Allows Them to Work



Question: Thinking about your family's current situation, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I will not be able to work without a consistent child care solution for my child(ren)?

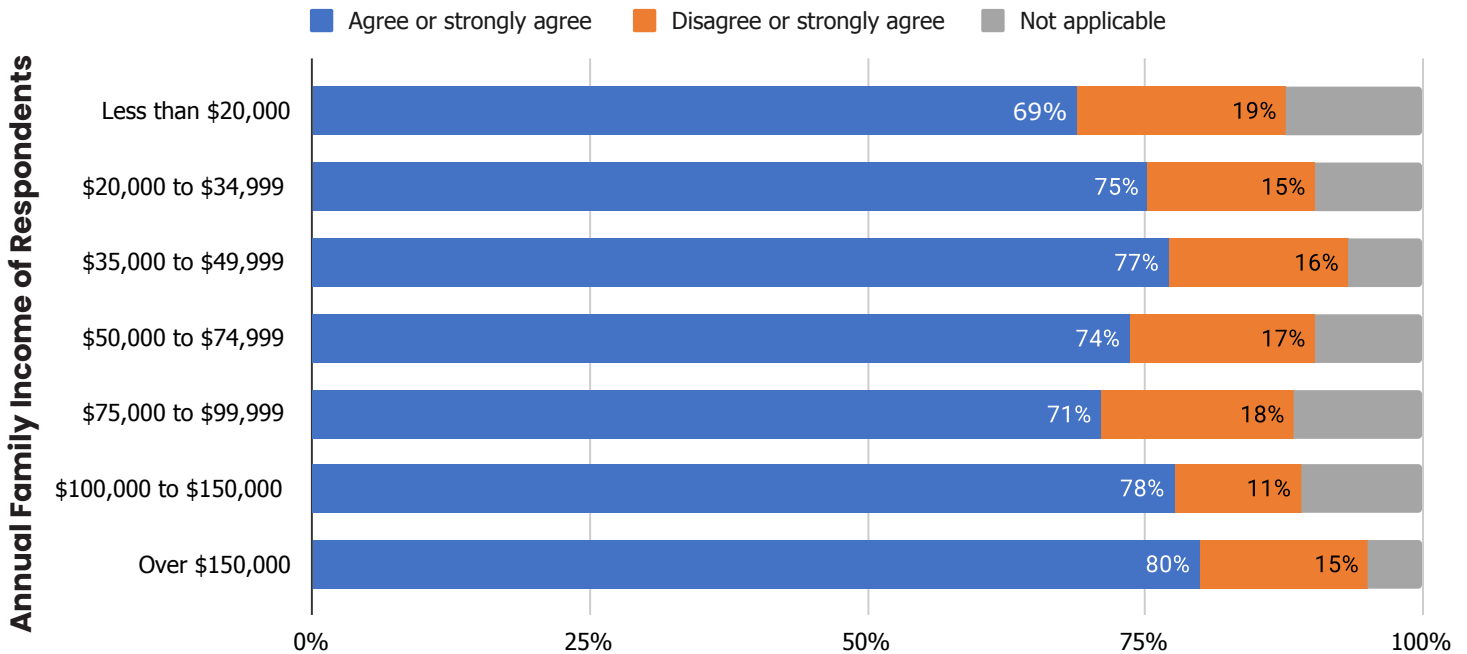
Figure 3: Current Work or School Schedule of Responding Parents



Question: What is your current work or school schedule?
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Figure 4:

Parents Who Agree Consistent Child Care Allows Them to Work by Income Level



Question: Thinking about your family's current situation, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I will not be able to work without a consistent child care solution for my child(ren)?

“It’s sad how much children are not valued in our society. I wish there were more and better options for parents.

— Parent, East Baton Rouge Parish

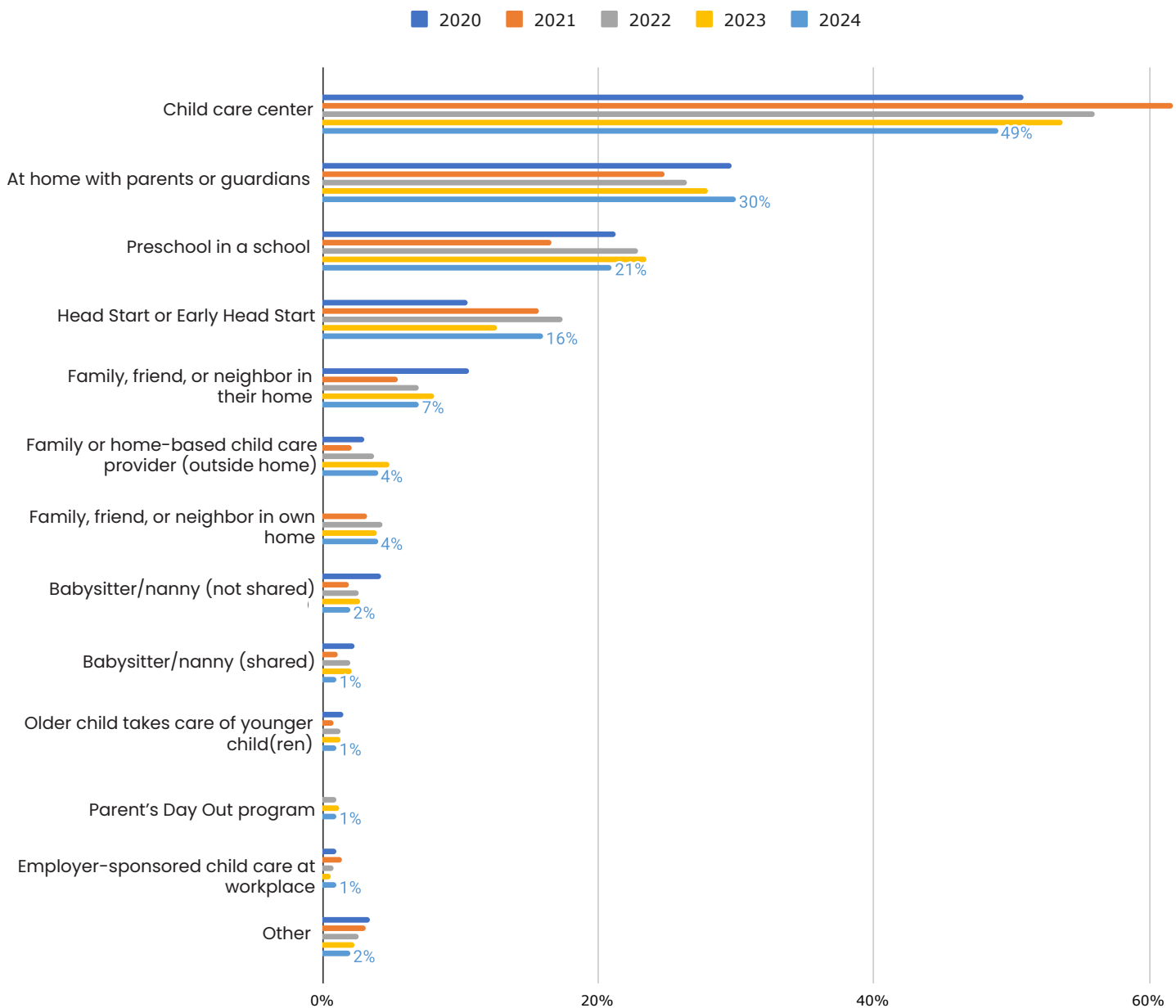


Child care outside of the home was essential for families with young children and was the most common type of child care for respondents.

- » Formal care options include child care centers, school-based preschool, Head Start or Early Head Start, family or home-based child care providers, and employer-sponsored child care at a workplace.
- » Nearly 50% of responding parents had at least one child in a child care center. Additionally, 21% had at least one child in a preschool program at a public or private school, and 16% had a child in a Head Start or Early Head Start program.

Figure 5:

Child Care Arrangements Used by Responding Parents



Question: What best describes your current child care arrangement(s)?

Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.



Child care facilities that are open are expensive and most are closed on days that school is as well which causes parents to take off work. They don't allow for time to pick up the kids for parents who work outside of the 8-5 Monday through Friday.

— Parent, Calcasieu Parish

More than three-fourths of parents reported relying on child care for more than 30 hours per week.

» On average, parents said their children were in care for nearly 36 hours each week.

Figure 6:

Typical Weekly Hours of Child Care Currently Used by Responding Parents

Weekly Child Care Hours Used	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
0 Hours	3%	3%	2%	1%	3%
1 to 10 Hours	6%	7%	9%	8%	9%
11 to 20 Hours	5%	3%	5%	3%	4%
21 to 30 Hours	9%	7%	8%	8%	9%
31 to 40 Hours	56%	57%	55%	56%	57%
41 to 50 Hours	16%	18%	16%	16%	14%
51 to 60 Hours	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%
More than 60 Hours	4%	4%	4%	5%	2%

Question: How many hours per week do you typically use your current child care arrangement(s) for your child(ren)? If you use more than one child care arrangement, please provide the total combined hours for ALL of your current child care arrangements. (Hours Per Week Range)

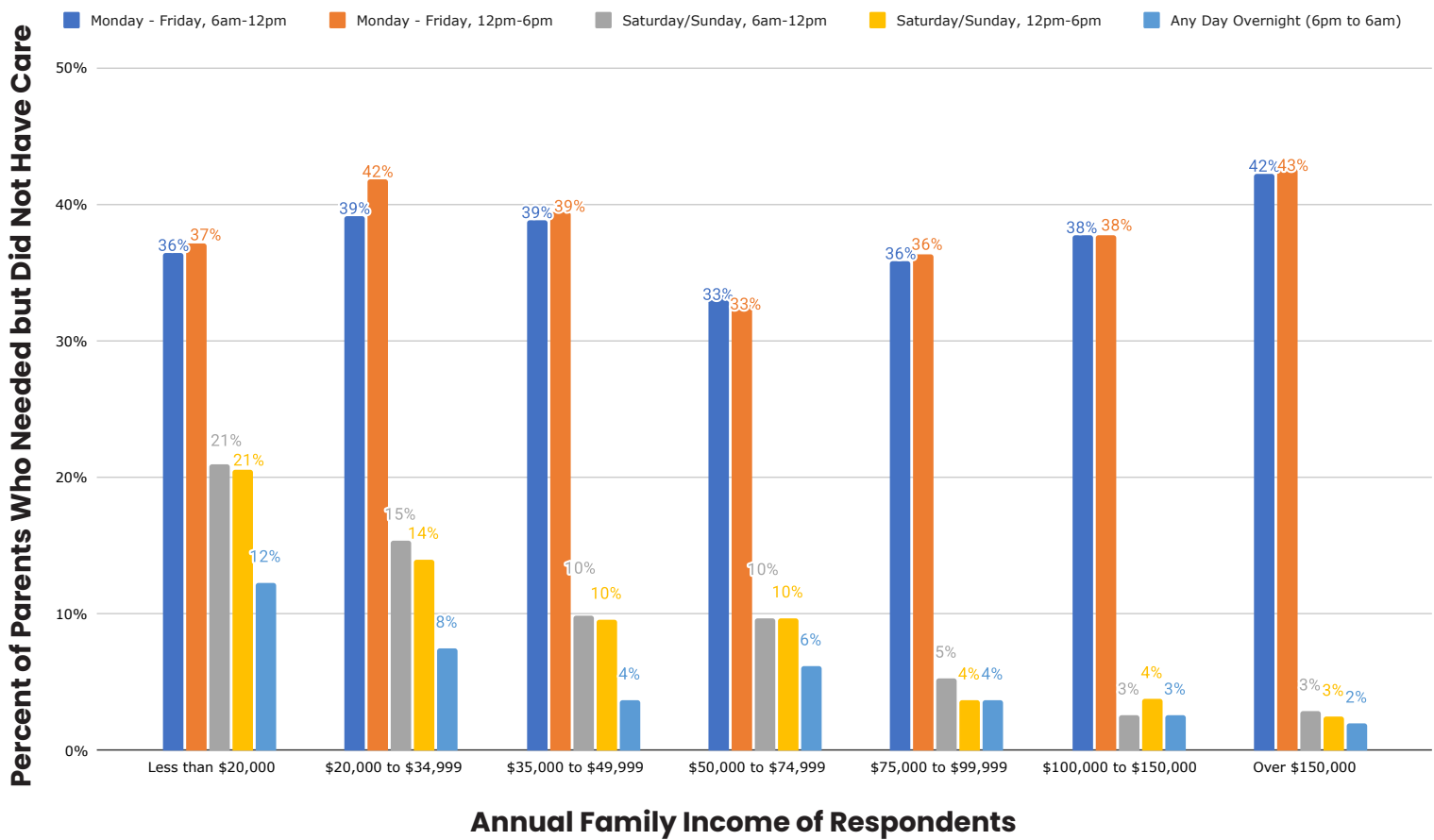
Despite their need for child care, many parents indicate finding sufficient coverage remains a challenge.

Parents needed and used child care throughout the work day.

- » Over 90% of respondents either had or needed child care during the hours of 6am to 6pm each weekday.
- » Nearly 30% of parents needed child care but did not have it during weekday work hours.
- » Additionally, many parents also relied on child care on the weekends to be able to work or attend school: more than 20% of parents stated they either needed or had child care during the hours of 6am to 6pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

Figure 7:

Percent of Responding Parents Who Needed but Did Not Have Child Care at Certain Times

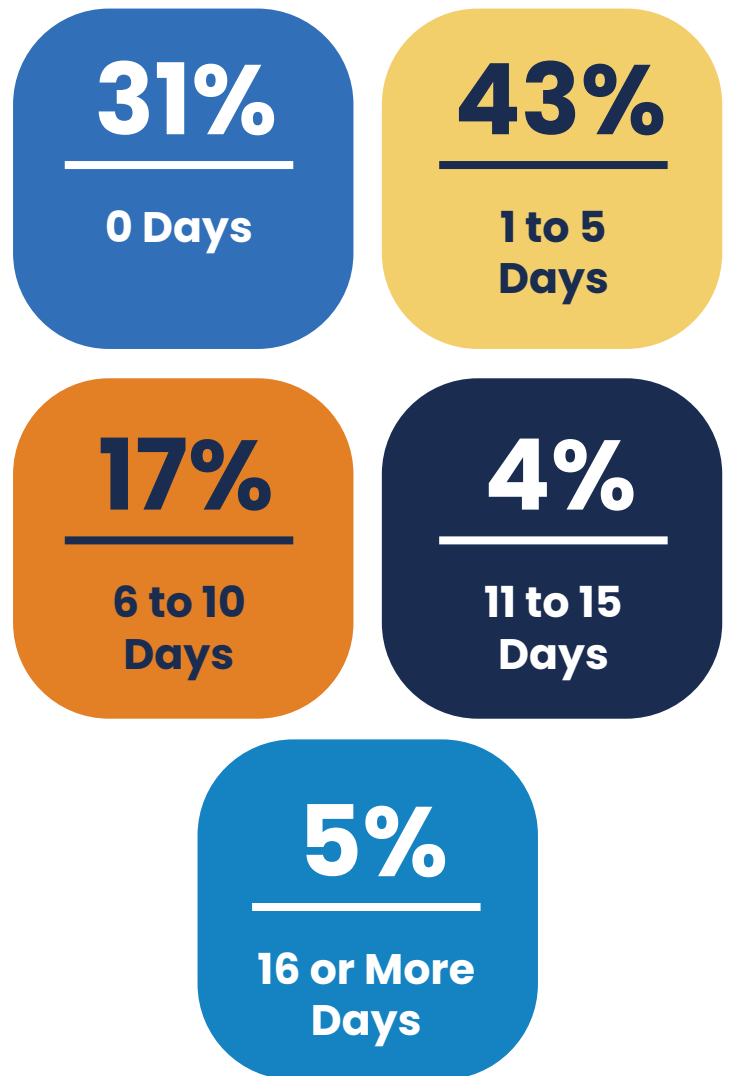


Question: What times of day do you typically need child care? Do you have child care at those times? Please check all that apply.
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Parents frequently could not work or attend school because they lacked child care.

- » Nearly 30% of parents needed child care but did not have it during weekday work hours.
- » Over two-thirds of respondents live in a household where at least one parent or guardian had to take time off from work in the past three months because their children could not attend child care for any reason.
- » On average, parents had to take off more than five days in the past three months due to a lack of child care coverage.
- » Nearly half of parents made some sort of adjustment to their work or school schedule to provide child care in the previous six months: 22% worked fewer hours in order to provide child care on their own, 21% alternated work or school hours, 15% worked outside of normal business hours, 14% worked remotely, 13% took unpaid leave, 12% took paid leave, 10% quit their job, and 9% refused or declined a promotion.

Figure 8:
Percent of Responding Families with Parent Work Absences Due to Child Care Disruption



Question: In the past 3 months (since August 2024), how many days have you or another parent/guardian in your household had to take off from work because your child(ren) could not attend their regular child care arrangement(s) for any reason?

“Child care should be universal, federally funded, and for all. I am disappointed that we do not take care of our citizens and children in this way.

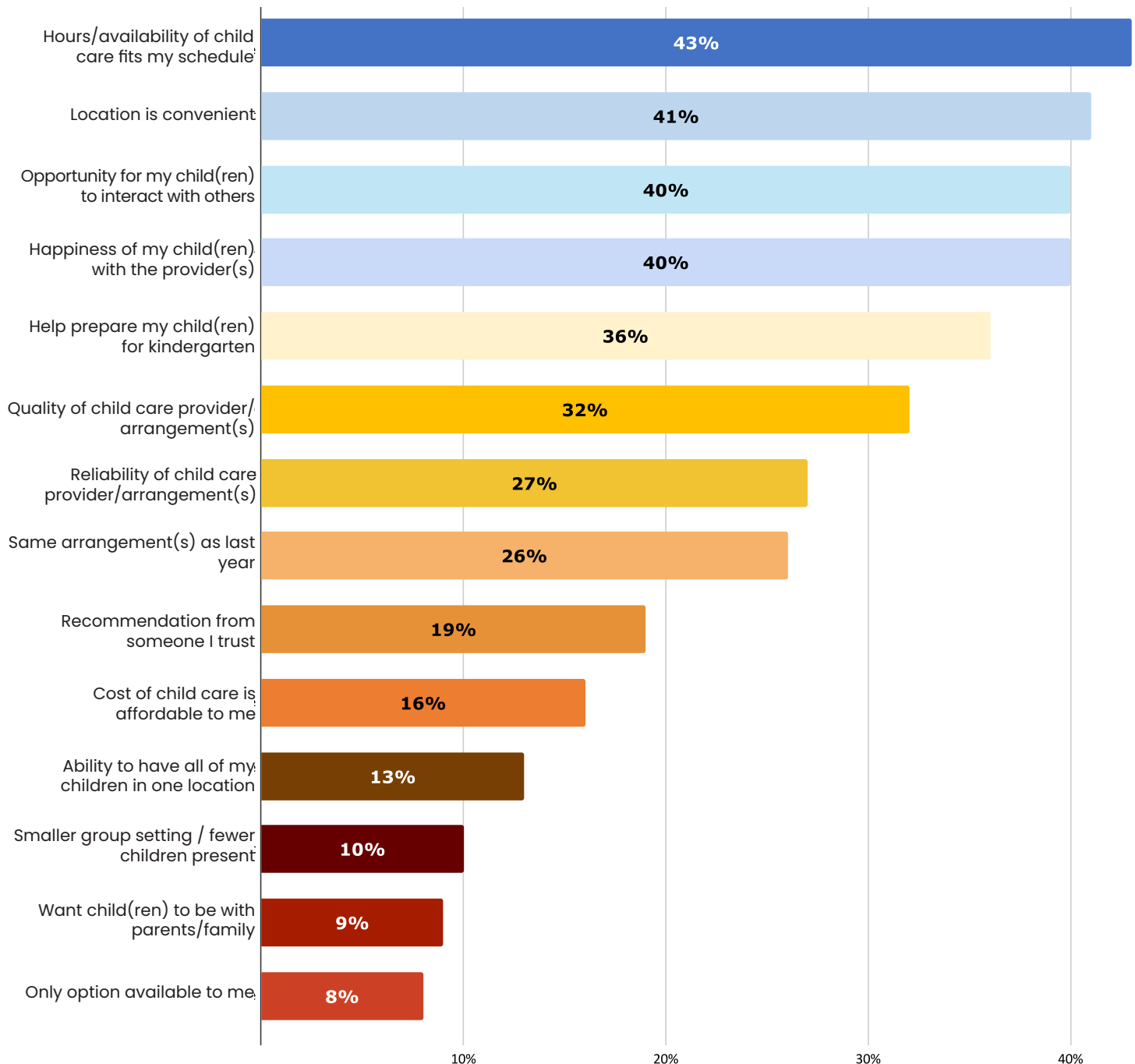
— Parent, Orleans Parish

Parents desired quality child care options, but often had to select child care based on availability and convenience in order to be able to work or attend school.

- » Parents indicated the main reasons for using their current child care arrangements were hours and availability (43%), convenient location (41%), the happiness of their children at the provider (40%), the opportunity for their child(ren) to interact with others (40%), and supporting kindergarten readiness (36%).

Figure 9:

Reasons for Using Current Child Care Arrangements by Responding Parents



Question: What are the main reasons for using your current child care arrangement(s)?

Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

Parents and guardians struggled to find reliable and consistent child care.

- » Parents depended on word-of-mouth recommendations and their own research when making their child care choices more than any other source of information: 45% of respondents said they found their child care based on a recommendation from family, a friend, a neighbor, or another parent, compared to 17% who found it via an internet search and 15% who found it through a local school.
- » Additionally, 22% of parents said it was difficult to find their current child care and 29% either intended to change child care in the next six months or were not sure if they would.
- » While most parents were satisfied with their current child care arrangement, 13% said they were very or somewhat dissatisfied.
- » For those parents either planning to or considering whether to switch child care, and who did not have a child aging out of a program, the top reason for possibly changing was the cost of care.



“ It was extremely difficult to find a place that had available space for my child/children. When I became pregnant, I immediately started calling [child care] to get on their waiting list. Most centers had waiting lists from 1–2 years long. It is a crisis for women in this state as basically you have to get on a waitlist before you even become pregnant to ensure you have a spot for your child.

— Parent, Calcasieu Parish

Affording child care is a major obstacle for most Louisiana families.

- » On average, parents reported spending **\$633 per child per month on child care or \$7,600 per year**. For a family with two children in care, that translates to more than \$15,000 per year.
- » Families paying for child care and not receiving any form of subsidized care reported their average cost per child was **\$1,183 a month for child care, or more than \$14,000 per year**. For a family with two children in child care, that translates to more than \$28,000 per year.
- » By means of comparison, the [federal poverty level for a family of four](#) for 2024 was \$31,200. That means that a family of four in Louisiana spending \$15,000 per year on child care would be dedicating almost one-half of their income to child care just so the parents could work. According to the federal government, families can spend a maximum of 7% of their family's income on child care and still be able to afford their other essential costs.
- » **A majority of families worried about being able to afford essential costs, including child care, housing, and utilities.**
- » Over half of parents said they worry about affording child care and 56% worry about affording their family's basic needs, like housing, utilities, and food.
- » **Notably, these anxieties about costs were shared across most income groups. A majority of parents making \$150,000 or less per year said they were worried about being able to afford the cost of child care.**
- » Additionally, nearly 60% of parents from families making less than \$100,000 per year said they worried about being able to afford their family's basic needs.

\$633

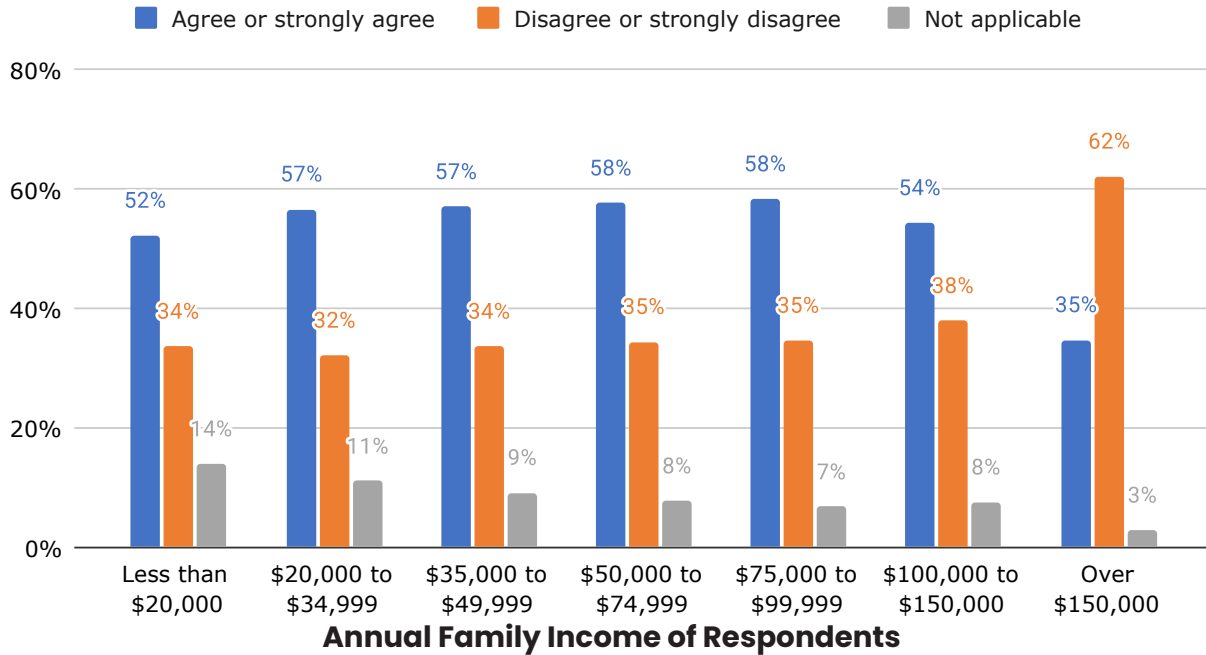
average monthly per child cost for all responding parents statewide

\$1,183

average monthly per child cost for all responding parents who did not receive subsidized child care

Figure 10:

Percent of Parents Concerned About Affording Child Care, by Income

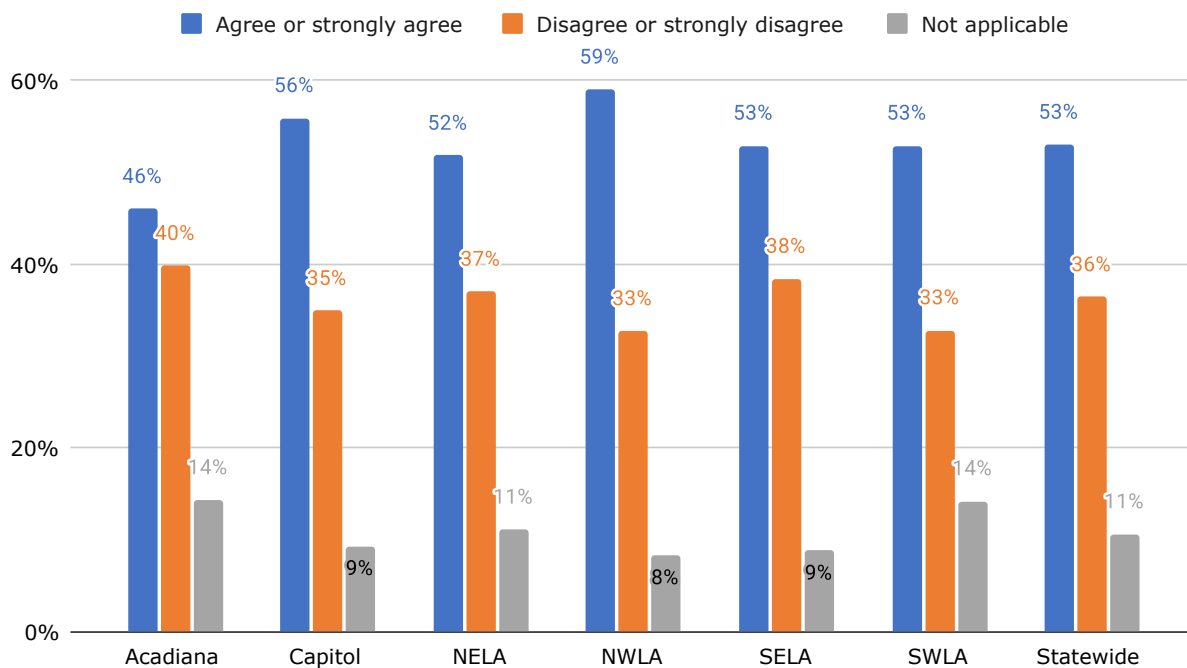


I quit my job to care for my child but it was over a year ago, and chose to not return to work as child care is unaffordable.

— Parent, Tangipahoa Parish

Figure 11:

Percent of Parents Concerned About Affording Child Care, by Region



Question: Thinking about your family's current situation, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I am worried about being able to afford child care?

Public assistance was essential to ensuring working parents could afford child care.

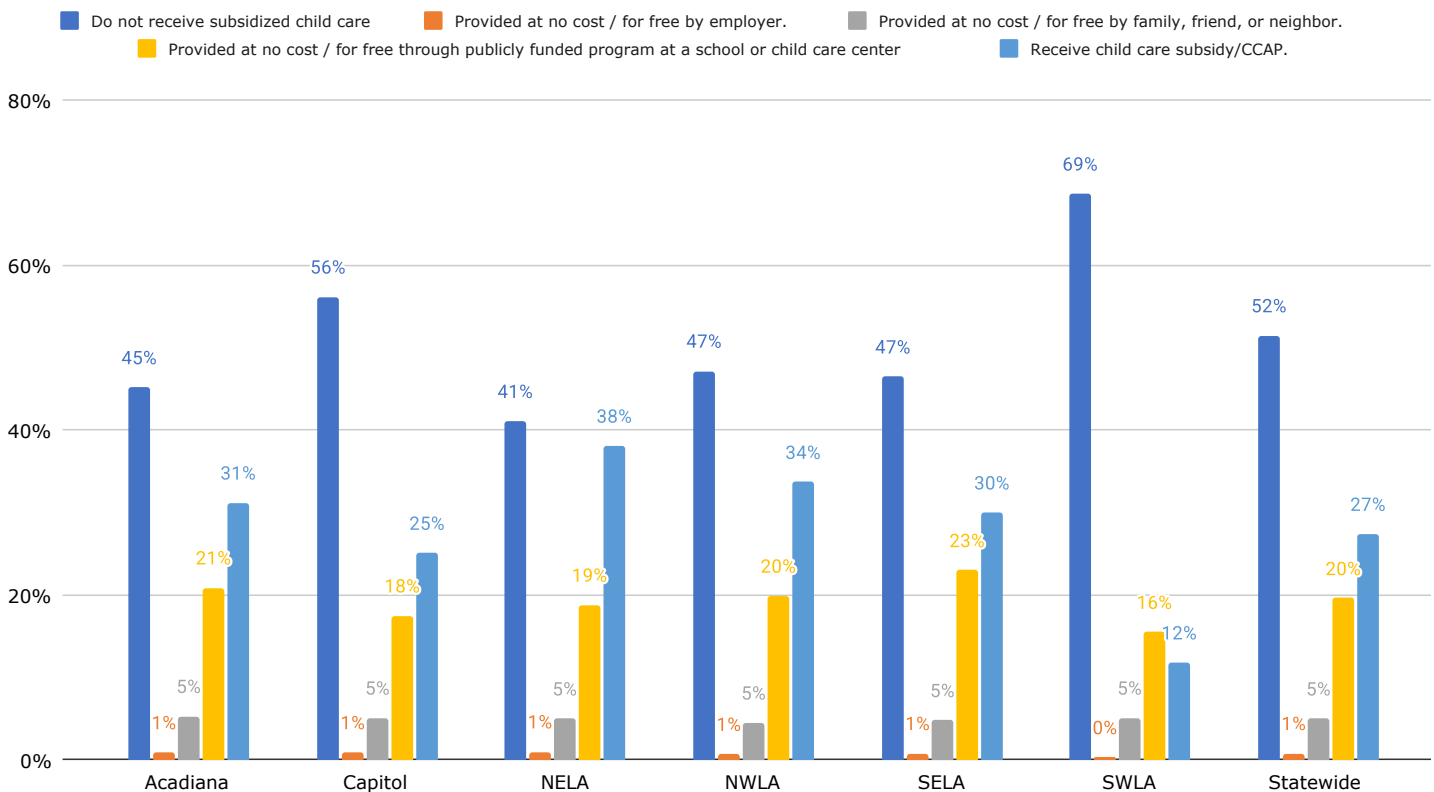
- » A majority of respondents (52%) did not receive any form of child care subsidy and paid for child care entirely out of their own pockets. Over 25% of parents received a child care subsidy, such as CCAP, and 20% had child care that was provided at no cost or for free through publicly funded programs, such as Head Start, LA4, or a city or school district's pre-K program.

Parents who received a subsidy were also more satisfied with their child care than those paying for child care on their own.

- » One-third of respondents not receiving any form of subsidized care were dissatisfied with the cost of their current child care arrangement, compared to 19% who received a subsidy but also paid something on their own, and 10% who received a child care subsidy like CCAP.

Figure 12:

Percent of Parents Receiving Subsidized Child Care, by Region



Question: Do you receive a child care subsidy or are these child care arrangements provided at no cost/for free? Please check all that apply.
 Note: Respondents may have selected more than one response. Percentages may total to more than 100%.

APPENDIX

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

LPIC developed and administered the Louisiana Child Care Parent Poll survey online through Survey Monkey from November 7, 2024, through November 27, 2024. Prospective respondents included any parent or guardian in Louisiana with at least one child under the age of 5 living in their home. Within the survey window, 3,431 responded to the survey, answering some or all of the survey questions.

The survey link was shared by LPIC, the Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana United Ways, resource and referral agencies, and nonprofit organizations through email newsletters and social media. The Louisiana Department of Education also distributed a letter to parents about the survey through Type I, II, and III child care centers.

In addition, individuals who applied for or received assistance through the Child Care Assistance Program in 2024 and provided a phone number to the Louisiana Department of Education received up to four text message reminders about the survey during the survey window. All text messages were sent between 9 am and 6 pm Central Time. The first text message was sent to 8,821 phone numbers, while 656 phone numbers unsubscribed from future text messages during the survey window.

For questions where some survey respondents did not provide an answer, the included results percentages reflect calculations based only on the number of survey respondents providing an answer to the question. For example, if only 100 survey respondents answered a question, the results would reflect what percentage of those 100 respondents selected each answer.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Figure A1: **Geographic Regions of Survey Respondents**

Region (Parishes)	Percent of Respondents	State Population (2020)
Acadiana (Acadia, Avoyelles, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, Rapides, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Vermilion, Vernon)	17%	18%
Capitol Region (Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, Tangipahoa, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana)	31%	21%
Northeast Louisiana (Caldwell, East Carroll, Franklin, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll)	6%	7%
Northwest Louisiana (Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Catahoula, Claiborne, Concordia, De Soto, Grant, Jackson, La Salle, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Webster, Winn)	8%	13%
Southeast Louisiana (Assumption, Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Terrebonne, Washington)	27%	33%
Southwest Louisiana (Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis)	11%	7%

Figure A2: **Children in Household of Survey Respondents**

Number of Children in Home	Percent of Respondents
1	31%
2	34%
3	20%
4	9%
5	3%
6 or more	3%

Figure A3: **Ages of Children in Household of Respondents**

Age of Children in Home	Percent of Respondents
Younger than 12 months	10%
12 months to 24 months	11%
2 years old	12%
3 years old	14%
4 years old	15%
5 to 12 years old	30%
13 to 18 years old	8%

Figure A4: **Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents**

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Respondents
American Indian / Native American / Alaska Native	2%
Asian	1%
Black/African American	37%
Hispanic / Latina / Latine / Latino	4%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	.3%
White	36%
Other	1%
Not provided	23%

Figure A5: **Family Income of Survey Respondents**

Annual Family Income	Percent of Respondents
Less than \$20,000	26%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	25%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	14%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	10%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	7%
\$100,000 to \$150,000	10%
Over \$150,000	8%

