

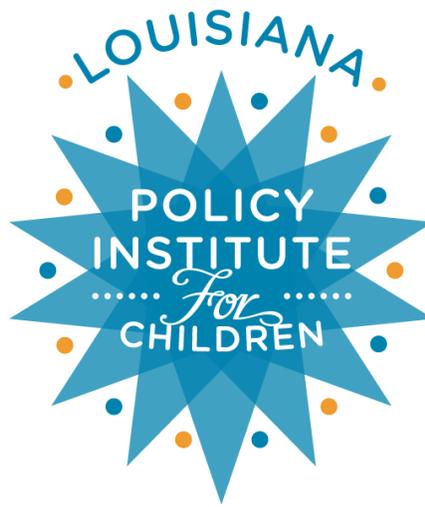


# **PAYING TO WORK:**

## **The True Cost of Early Childhood Education for Louisiana Families**

**STATEWIDE REPORT FINDINGS: OCTOBER 15-29, 2025**





## AUTHORS & CONTRIBUTORS

**Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D.**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Mattilyn Karst Batson**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Heather Cope**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Ashley Hebert**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Sadie Becnel, Esq**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Victoria Gudino**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Corey Himes**

*Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*

**Vincent Rossmeier**

*NOIR Consulting*

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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.*

Access to affordable child care continues to be a critical issue for many working families in Louisiana. Despite a combined state and federal contribution of nearly \$600 million to various Louisiana early childhood education (ECE) programs, only 18% of in-need children under age 3 are currently being served in Louisiana. This gap highlights a significant disparity in access to child care for the families who need it the most.

The ultimate goal of a successful ECE system is to provide parents with the ability to choose the child care arrangement that best suits their family's needs and prepare their children for lifelong success. However, the reality for many Louisiana families is far different. As of October 2025, at least 5,151 working parents and 7,246 children were eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) but could not access it due to a years-long waitlist.

The statewide waitlist exacerbates the reality that for many Louisiana families, child care costs are a significant financial challenge, often competing with other essential household expenses. In fact, for families with children under age 5, child care can be the most expensive item in their budget. Unlike saving for a child's college education, which many families plan for over 18 years, there is little to no financial preparation for the steep costs of ECE programs. When families are unable to access public assistance, they must bear the full cost of child care themselves, which for many is financially unfeasible.

Addressing these barriers to child care access is crucial for fostering a more equitable and sustainable ECE system in Louisiana. Expanding access to affordable child care will not only support the well-being of children but also empower working parents to achieve greater economic mobility, thereby strengthening the state's workforce and economy.

# SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

## WITHOUT CHILD CARE, MOST LOUISIANA PARENTS COULD NOT WORK.

In this year's survey, most responding parents:

- Worked or attended school full-time outside the home.
- Utilized child care for nearly 40 hours a week in order to work or attend school.
- Confirmed they would not be able to work without consistent child care coverage. This was true for parents at every level of income.
- Paid for child care independently, without any form of public subsidy.
- 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.

Additionally, many parents also stated they alternated hours with another parent or adult in their household to ensure their children had child care, and they were working fewer hours than they desired due to a lack of child care.

## RISING COSTS MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR PARENTS TO AFFORD CHILD CARE.

- **Child care is a significant expense:**
  - On average, parents reported spending **\$870 per child per month on child care or \$10,441 per year**. For a family with two children in care, that translates to nearly **\$21,000 per year**.
  - The average costs were even higher for those families paying for child care who did not receive any form of subsidized care. Parents paying for child care entirely out-of-pocket noted their average cost per child was **\$930 a month for child care, or more than \$11,000 per year**. For a family with two children in child care, that translates to more than **\$22,000 per year**.
- **The impact of these costs had a significant impact on families' health and well-being.**
  - **A majority of families worried about being able to afford child care**, as well as essential costs, including housing and food. Most parents also said their **stress levels were higher than normal**. Almost one-quarter of parents said they were dissatisfied with the cost of their child care.
- **The high costs of child care worry most families — regardless of income.**
  - **A majority of parents making \$100,000 or less per year said they were worried about being able to afford the cost of child care.** Of the 10% of parents who said they planned to change child care providers in the next six months, the most common reason was because they no longer could afford their current arrangements.
- **Most families had to pay for child care on their own.** While K-12 education is free for any family enrolled in a public school, a majority of parents with young children paid for child care without any form of subsidy, public assistance, or support from their employer.

## PARENTS STRUGGLE TO FIND CARE THAT IS AFFORDABLE AND CONVENIENT.

- **Parents need convenient and affordable child care to work and attend school.**
  - The hours of availability and location of their child care were the top reasons parents selected a provider, but 36% said they struggled to work or attend school due to lack of care.
  - Most parents were satisfied with their child care, but 36% said they struggled to work or attend school due to lack of care.

# SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

**MORE THAN 7 OUT OF 10 PARENTS SAY THEY COULD NOT WORK WITHOUT RELIABLE CHILD CARE.**



## CHILD CARE IS VITAL TO THE ECONOMY AS IT ENSURES PARENTS CAN WORK.

- **Parents need child care to work.**
  - **More than 70% of parents** reported they could not work without a reliable child care arrangement for their children.
- **Child care is needed throughout the workday – and on weekends.**
  - **More than 90% of parents relied on child care** for at least some part of the weekday workday (the hours of 6 am to 6 pm Monday through Friday), and 78% of parents used child care for at least 30 hours per week. Around 7% of parents also used child care on the weekend.
- **Most parents need more child care coverage than they currently have.**
  - Even with their current child care arrangements in place, **nearly 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.

## 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 increased investment in early childhood systems by investing state general funds into the Child Care Assistance Program and increasing subsidy rates to better align with the true cost of child care.** When child care subsidy rates do not reflect the cost of providing care, families are often asked to make up the difference through higher tuition or fees, even when they are eligible for assistance. Increasing subsidy rates would enable higher-quality care and alleviate some of the financial burden on parents.
- **Implement a graduated phase-out of Child Care Assistance Program eligibility to support job advancement.** Parents can face a sudden loss of child care assistance when their income increases even slightly. This disincentivizes parents to accept additional hours, pursue higher-paying jobs, or advance in the workforce. Allowing parents who increase their income beyond the standard 85% of the state median income after they are granted initial eligibility to receive a phased-out benefit would mean that Louisiana's workforce would gain stronger talent and parents would be able to create a better financial path for their families.
- **Incentivize and expand access to child care during nontraditional or extended hours to match the demands of the workforce.** For parents working early mornings, evenings, overnight shifts, or on weekends, securing reliable child care can be a barrier to seeking the employment parents desire. Families report turning down jobs, limiting hours, or relying on unstable arrangements because care is not available when they need it. System-level capacity building ultimately benefits providers and parents, as more child care options that are affordable, reliable, and high-quality mean a stronger family foundation and a more robust Louisiana workforce.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

*This report summarizes the findings from this year's parent survey.*

## ACCESS TO CHILD CARE IS THE BACKBONE OF LOUISIANA'S ECONOMY.

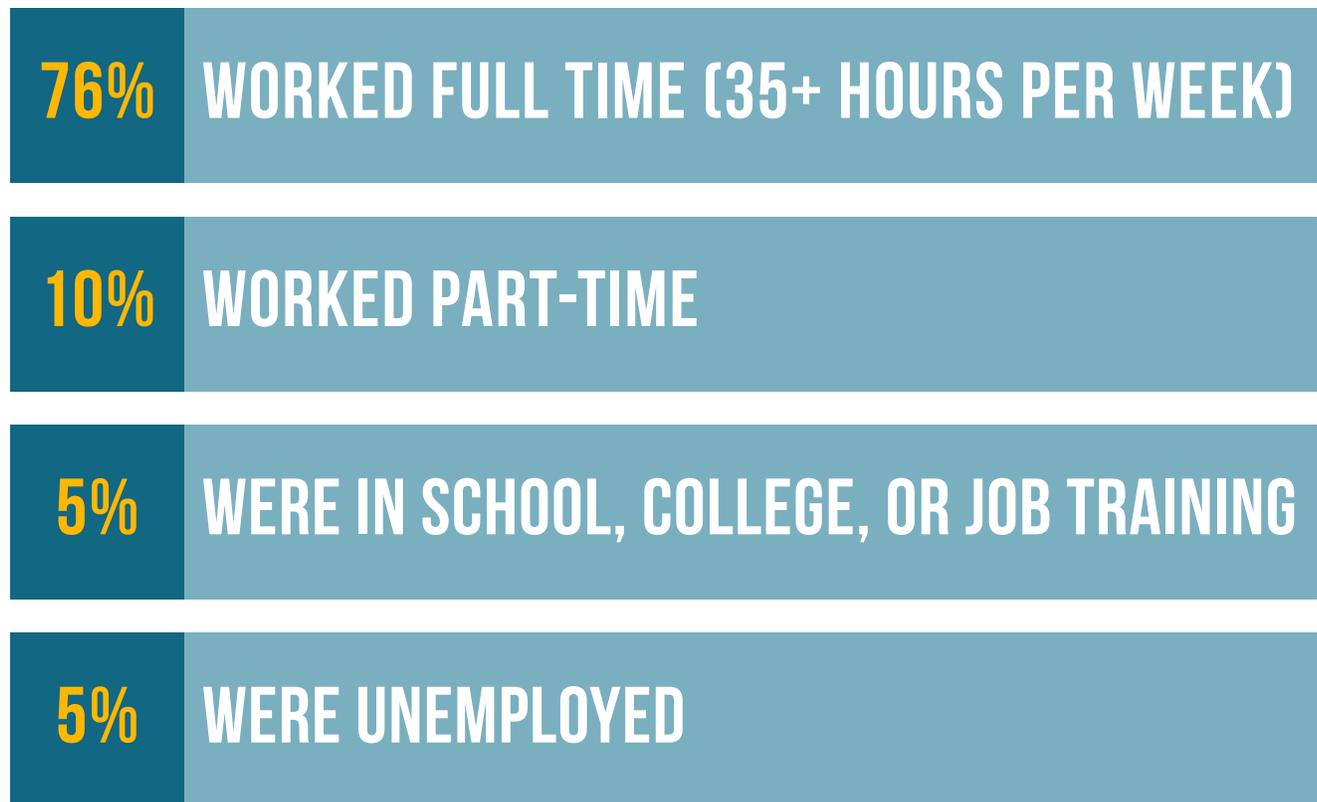
More than 80% of respondents were employed.

- Over 75% of this year's respondents worked full-time (at least 35 hours a week), while another 10% worked part-time — 3% even worked more than one job. Another 5% were currently attending school. Parents could not work or attend school without having child care.

Over 75% of parents reported relying on child care for more than 30 hours per week.

- On average, parents said their children were in care for more than 38 hours each week, which was two more hours than the average in 2024.

**Figure 1: Work or School Situation of Responding Parents**



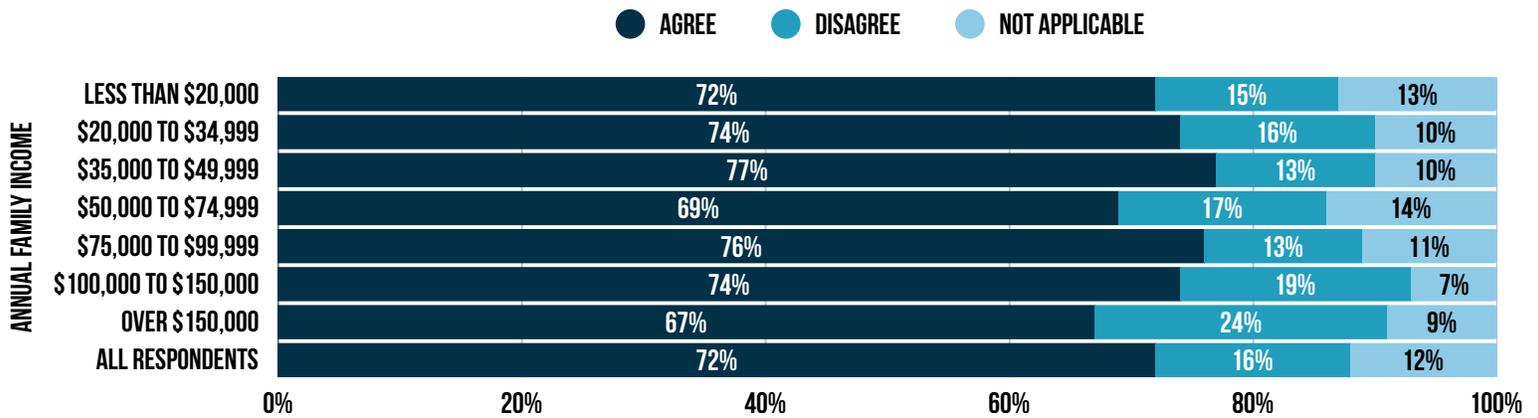
*Question: What is your current work or school schedule?*

# SURVEY FINDINGS

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

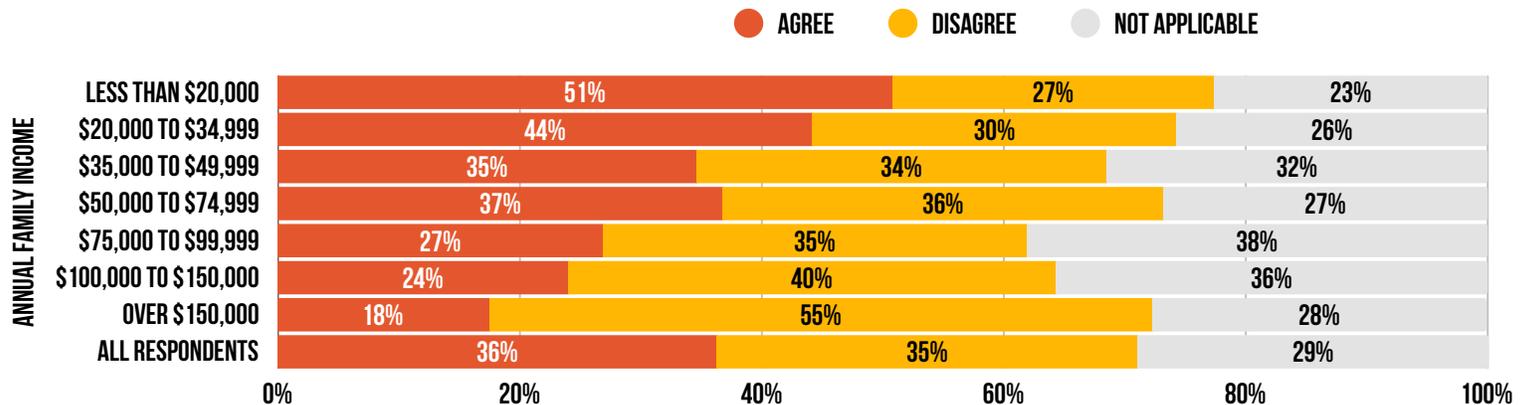
- Notably, having consistent child care was essential in enabling parents at all income levels the ability to work or attend school: 71% of respondents making below \$20,000 a year said they would not be able to work or attend school without consistent child care, which was comparable to the 67% of respondents making over \$150,000 a year (the highest income range).
- Over one-third (36%) of respondents also said they struggled to work or attend school when they did not have child care. This was a particularly poignant issue for families with lower levels of income: a majority (51%) of respondents making less than \$20,000 a year agreed with this statement, the highest of respondents in any income bracket.

**Figure 2: Parents Agree They Could not Work Without Consistent Child Care**



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: Parents Struggling to Work or Attend School Without Child Care**



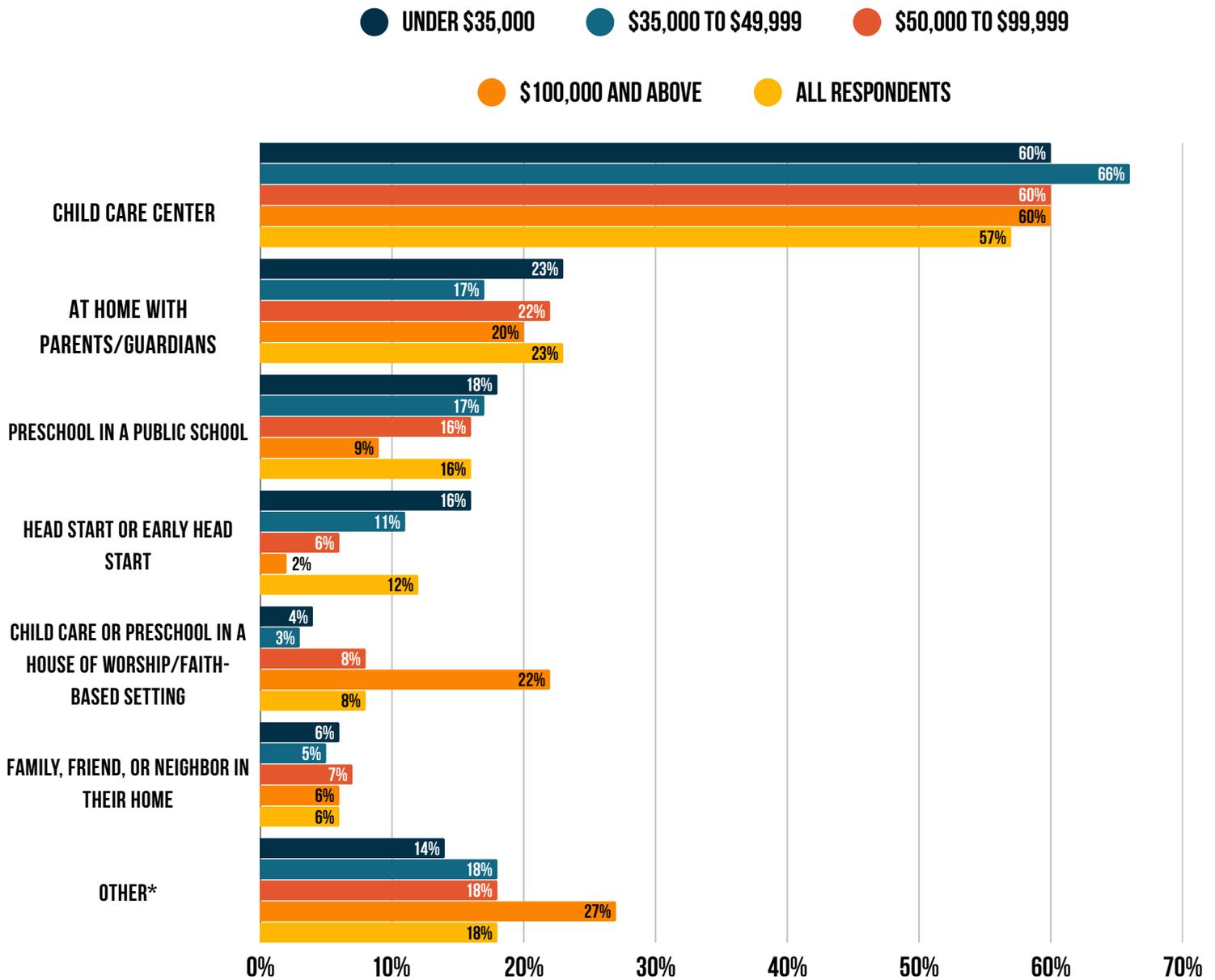
Question: Thinking about your family's current situation, do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I am struggling to work or attend school without child care.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

At all income levels, most families rely on child care outside the home.

- A majority (57%) of all respondents stated they had their children in a child care center outside of their home, while another 16% utilized a preschool in a public school, and 12% relied on Head Start or Early Head Start. Comparatively, only 23% had their child at home. The high level of parents relying on child care centers outside the home was consistent across all income levels, with 54% of families making less than \$20,000 annually and 59% of families making more than \$150,000 annually using this option.

**Figure 4: Parents' Current Child Arrangements by Annual Family Income**



Question: What best describes your current child care arrangement(s) for your children under the age of 5?

\* Includes: Preschool in a private school; family, friend, or neighbor in your home; family or home-based child care provider (in someone else's home); babysitter/nanny (my children only); babysitter/nanny (shared with other family/families); Mother's/Father's/Parent's Day Out program; older child takes care of younger child(ren); on-site child care at your workplace; other.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

## MANY PARENTS STRUGGLE TO FIND RELIABLE CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS.

Parents needed and used child care throughout the work day – and many need more care than is available on weekends.

- At least three-fourths of respondents either had or needed child care during the hours of 6am to 6pm each weekday. Around 10% of parents needed child care but did not have it during weekday work hours.
- Additionally, 7% of parents also relied on child care on the weekends to be able to work or attend school, while an additional 15% said they needed child care from 6 am to 6 pm on Saturdays and Sundays but did not have it. The need for child care was particularly high among parents who worked in, healthcare, retail (such as at grocery stores), and transportation, showing how vital child care is to ensure working parents can perform in some of the key industries in Louisiana's economy.



### PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO HAD OR NEEDED CARE EACH DAY OF THE WEEK

**90%**

6 AM TO 12 PM  
MON. - FRI.

**85%**

12 PM TO 6 PM  
MON. - FRI.

**22%**

6 AM TO 12 PM  
SAT. & SUN.

**22%**

12 PM TO 6 PM  
SAT. & SUN.

**“ I love child care. It makes being a mother less stressful. – Capitol Region Parent**

# SURVEY FINDINGS

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 38 hours a week.

**Figure 5: Typical Weekly Hours of Child Care Currently Used by Responding Parents**

Weekly Child Care Hours Used	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>0 Hours</b>	3%	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%
<b>1 to 10 hours</b>	6%	7%	9%	8%	9%	8%
<b>11 to 20 hours</b>	5%	3%	5%	3%	4%	4%
<b>21 to 30 hours</b>	9%	7%	8%	8%	9%	8%
<b>31 to 40 hours</b>	56%	57%	55%	56%	57%	57%
<b>41 to 50 hours</b>	16%	18%	16%	16%	14%	16%
<b>51 to 60 hours</b>	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	2%
<b>More than 60 hours</b>	4%	4%	4%	5%	2%	3%

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)

# SURVEY FINDINGS

# 68%

*of households had at least one parent miss work in the past three months due to a lack of child care.*

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

- Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) 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.

Parents also frequently had to adjust their work or school schedules due to a lack of sufficient child care.

- Nearly 20% of respondents stated they had alternated their work or school hours with someone in their household in order to provide their own child care. And 19% said they had worked fewer hours over the past year in order to provide their own child care. Additionally, 14% said they had worked outside of normal business hours in order to provide their own child care, 13% said they had worked remotely to provide child care, 11% said they had taken unpaid leave, 11% offered they had taken paid leave, and 7% stated they had quit their job in order to provide child care. This shows how a lack of child care negatively impacts Louisiana's economy by keeping parents who want to be working from doing so. Notably, parents at the highest levels of income (making over \$150,000 annually) were the most likely to report having to work fewer hours or to work remotely in order to provide their own care.

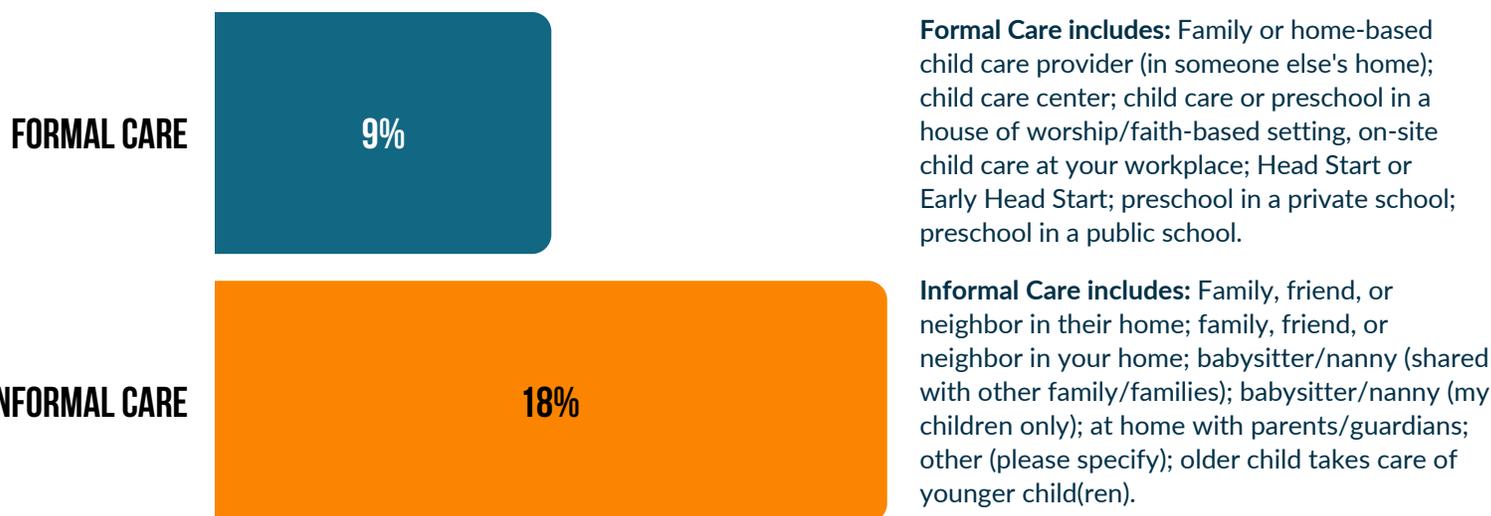


# SURVEY FINDINGS

Parents with home-based child care had the highest rates of dissatisfaction with their arrangements.

- More than 30% of parents who relied on babysitters or nannies (either in their home or shared with other families) expressed overall dissatisfaction with their child care arrangements. This was around three times the rate of dissatisfaction shared by families using Head Start or Early Head Start (10%), preschool in a public schools (10%), child care centers (8%), child care or preschool in a house of worship/faith-based setting (7%), or preschool in a private school (4%).
- Parents who used home-based child care arrangements also had the highest rates of dissatisfaction with the quality of these arrangements: around 20% of parents were dissatisfied with the quality of babysitters or nannies (whether shared or only their own children), and family or home-based child care providers (in someone else's home).

**Figure 6: Parent Dissatisfaction with Child Care by Type**



## PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS DISSATISFIED

Question: Are you dissatisfied or unhappy with your current child care arrangement(s) overall?

Note: Less than 1% of respondents using "Mother's/Father's/Parent's Day Out" programs reported dissatisfaction.

*"I absolutely love my daughter's [child care]. Even though we moved and there are closer centers, I couldn't imagine her going anywhere else. They know her so well and I feel safe and secure with her in their care."  
— Acadiana Region Parent*

# SURVEY FINDINGS

Parents often had to prioritize convenience and available hours over quality in child care options in order to be able to work or attend school.

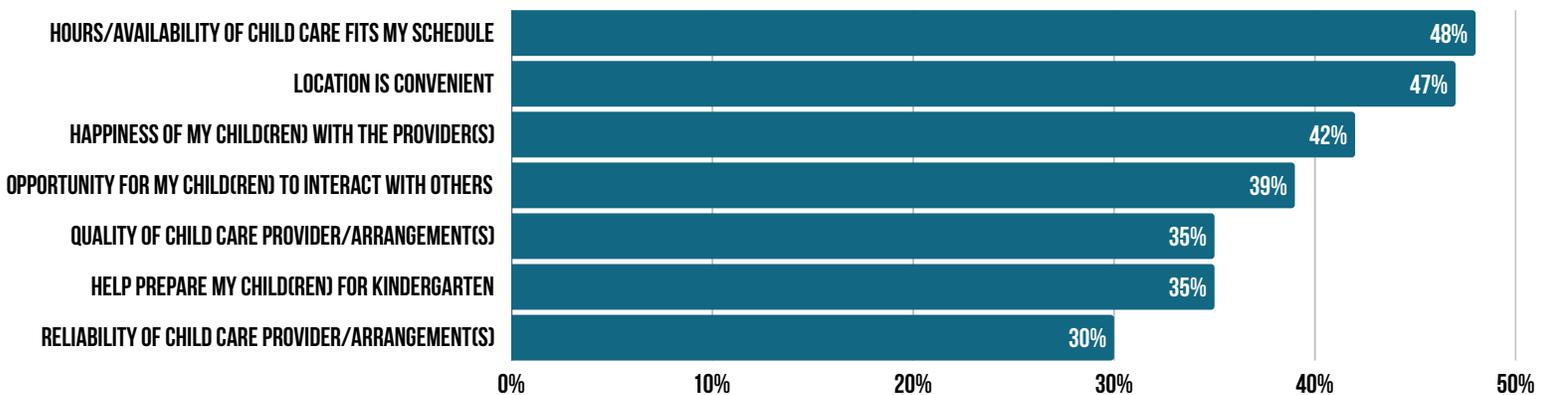
- Parents ranked the hours and availability of the child care (48%) and the convenience of the location (47%) as their top two reasons for selecting their arrangements. This was followed by the happiness of their children with the provider (42%), the opportunity for their children to interact with others (39%), and the quality of child care provider/arrangement (35%).
- Almost 60% of parents stated their commute time to and from child care each day was at least 16 minutes, including 22% who had commutes of greater than 30 minutes.

**Figure 7: Travel Time to and from Child Care Each Day**



Question: On a typical day, how much time do you spend traveling to and from your primary child care provider? Please provide total travel time, including the commute for drop-off and pickup.

**Figure 8: Hours and Location Main Reasons for Selecting Child Care Arrangements**



Question: What are the main reasons for using your current child care arrangement(s)? [Respondents could select more than one response.]  
Note: Respondents could select from a total of 28 options. No more than 30% of respondents selected any of the other options.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

For many parents and guardians, finding reliable and consistent child care was a challenge.

- The majority of parents (55%) used word-of-mouth recommendations when making their child care choices, compared to 23% who found their arrangements through an internet search, 15% through a local school, and less than 5% who found it through a local resource and referral agency, the Louisiana School and Center Finder website, or a community network event.
- Additionally, 11% of parents said it was difficult to find their current child care and 10% said they were planning to change their child care arrangements in the next six months. For those who did plan to change, the top reason was no longer being able to afford their current arrangements.
- While most parents were satisfied with their current child care arrangement, 11% said they were very or somewhat dissatisfied.



# SURVEY FINDINGS

## THE AFFORDABILITY OF CHILD CARE IS A MAJOR STRAIN ON PARENTS.

- On average, parents reported spending **\$870 per child per month on child care or \$10,441 per year**. For a family with two children in care, that translates to **nearly \$21,000 per year**.
- The average costs were even higher for those families paying for child care who did not receive any form of subsidized care. Parents paying for ECE entirely out-of-pocket noted their average cost per child was **\$930 a month for child care, or more than \$11,000 per year**. For a family with two children in child care, that translates to more than **\$22,000 per year**.
- Nearly one-quarter (22%) of parents said they were dissatisfied with the cost of child care, which was more than double the rate of dissatisfaction parents expressed about the provider's quality, health and safety practices, ability to meet their scheduling needs, ability to support the development of their children, and ability of their teachers to talk about their children's progress.
- By means of comparison, the federal poverty level for a family of four for 2024 was \$32,150. That means that a family of four in Louisiana who spent \$21,000 per year on child care for two children would be dedicating 65% of their income to child care just so the parents could work. The federal government defines child care as affordable when it consumes no more than 7% of a family's income, allowing households to meet other basic needs.

**Figure 9: Average Child Care Costs for Families Per Child**

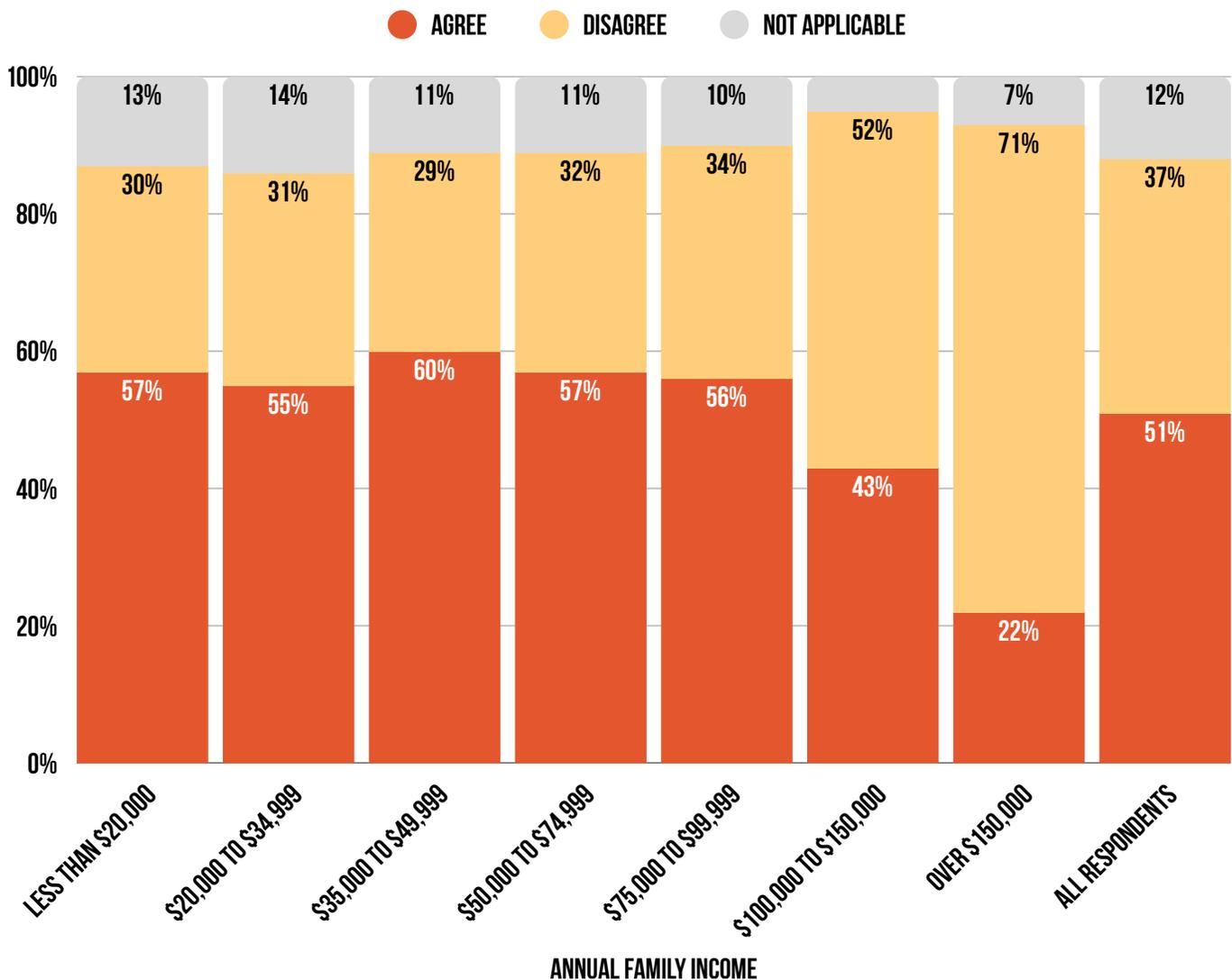


# SURVEY FINDINGS

Most parents and guardians worried about being able to afford essential costs, including child care, housing, and utilities.

- Over half (54%) said they were worried about being able to afford their family's basic needs (such as rent/mortgage, food, utilities, essential supplies, and other bills). Additionally, 51% of parents said they were worried about being able to afford child care. These costs take a toll on parents' health and well-being, with 53% agreeing their stress level as a parent was higher than usual.
- For many parents, these fears were a reality: over the past six months, 31% said they had struggled to pay utilities, 30% housing and rent, 26% groceries, and 24% child care.

**Figure 10: Percent of Parents Worried About Affording Child Care, by Income**



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?

# SURVEY FINDINGS

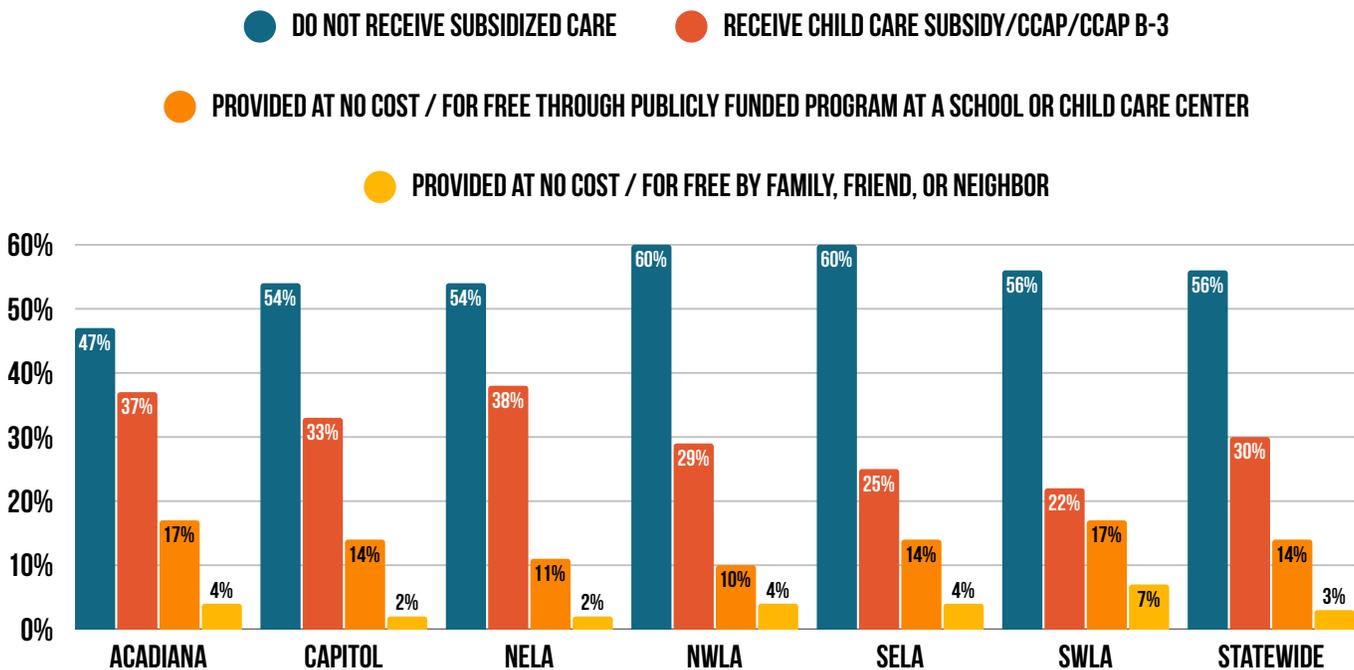
These fears about costs were shared across most income groups. A majority of parents making \$100,000 or less per year said they were worried about being able to afford the cost of child care and their basic needs.

- More than 40% of families making between \$100,000 and \$150,000 also expressed worries about affording these costs.

Only a fraction of families received public assistance, but it was essential to ensuring those working parents could afford child care.

- A majority of respondents (56%) did not receive any form of child care subsidy or employer assistance, meaning they paid for child care entirely out of their own pockets. Almost one-third (30%) of parents received a child care subsidy, such as CCAP, and 14% 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. A majority of respondents who received CCAP said that it had taken at least two months from the time they applied to be able to start using it.
- Nearly 45% of parents said they had or planned to claim the School Readiness Tax Credit on their 2024 Louisiana tax return. For those who had not or did not plan to claim the credit, the most common reason was that they were not familiar with it.

**Figure 9: 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%.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

## APPENDIX

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

LPIC developed and administered the Louisiana Child Care Parent Poll survey online through Survey Monkey from October 15, 2025, through October 29, 2025. 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, 2,789 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 texts, 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 2025 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 9am and 6pm Central Time. The first text message was sent to 14,994 phone numbers, while 120 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.

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

Region (Parishes)	Percent of Respondents	State Population (2020)
<b>Acadiana</b> (Acadia, Avoyelles, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, Rapides, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Vermilion, Vernon)	13%	18%
<b>Capitol Region</b> (Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, Tangipahoa, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana)	24%	21%
<b>Northeast Louisiana</b> (Caldwell, Catahoula, East Carroll, Franklin, La Salle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll)	9%	7%
<b>Northwest Louisiana</b> (Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, Concordia, De Soto, Grant, Jackson, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Webster, Winn)	10%	13%
<b>Southeast Louisiana</b> (Assumption, Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Terrebonne, Washington)	37%	33%
<b>Southwest Louisiana</b> (Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis)	7%	7%

# SURVEY FINDINGS

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

Number of Children	Percentage of Respondents
1	14%
2	30%
3	25%
4	16%
5	7%
6 or more	8%

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

Age of Children in Home	Percentage of Respondents
Younger than 12 months	10%
12 months to 23 months	10%
2 Years Old	12%
3 Years Old	14%
4 Years Old	14%
5 to 12 Years Old	31%
13 to 18 Years Old	9%

**Figure A4: Family Income of Survey Respondents**

Annual Family Income	Percentage of Respondents
Less than \$20,000	23%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	22%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	14%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11%
\$100,000 to \$150,000	11%
Over \$150,000	13%

**Figure A5: Race of Survey Respondents**

Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
American Indian / Native American / Alaska Native	2%
Asian	1%
Black/African American	33%
Hispanic / Latina / Latine / Latino	3%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	<1%
White	41%
Other	1%
Not Provided	23%

