

**NORTH CENTRAL MICHIGAN  
COLLEGE CHILD CARE INITIATIVE  
PHASE ONE FINDINGS: SURVEYING  
EMMET COUNTY'S CHILD CARE  
LANDSCAPE**

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*Karen Ann Kling, Jennifer Wixson, Laura Tuthill, William D. Lopez*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Executive Summary.....	3
Methodology.....	5
Employer Survey.....	6
Parent and Prospective Parent Survey and Focus Groups.....	9
Child Care Provider Survey.....	15
Next Steps.....	18
Endnotes.....	21

## **AUTHORS**

Karen Kling, Poverty Solutions  
Jennifer Wixson, North Central Michigan College  
Laura Tuthill, North Central Michigan College  
William D. Lopez, Poverty Solutions

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Afton Branche-Wilson, Poverty Solutions  
Ruth Archer, Poverty Solutions

## INTRODUCTION

Emmet County faces a dearth of affordable, quality child care options, with available child care having steadily declined over the past five years. In Michigan, there are about four children under age 12 for every available child care spot.<sup>1</sup> The areas with the least child care availability are often rural and concentrated in northern Michigan, like Emmet County.<sup>2</sup>

The undersupply of child care is a systemic issue that impacts parents, prospective parents, local employers, and child care providers. The child care industry has long been devalued in the U.S.,<sup>3</sup> leaving the system underfunded and unsustainable in Emmet County and across the U.S. Yet, we know that high quality, affordable, and reliable child care is essential for the economic stability and mobility of families anywhere.

Responding to this challenge, North Central Michigan College (NCMC) has launched its Child Care Initiative (CCI) Project to lead the development of a community-centered plan for a sustainable and viable local child care system in Emmet County.<sup>4</sup> The first phase of this three-phase project focused on collecting data from the community about views, needs, and ideas for the future of Emmet County's child care system.

Collecting data on community opinions and experiences is essential to this project to ensure that resident needs are central to decision making and guide further research. Every community faces unique challenges to establishing a child care system. Thus, we must not only look at national and state level trends but collect data local to Emmet County to ensure solutions are tailor-made to the community, feasible for local implementation, and primed for sustainability. This report summarizes the findings from NCMC's data collection efforts from phase one of the work, in partnership with Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan. We will use the data collected in phase one to begin developing and prototyping innovations for implementation and evaluation in future stages of work.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We collected survey responses from 96 business leaders, 271 parents and prospective parents, and 25 child care providers who live or work in Emmet County. **Results show the multifaceted nature of child care issues in the region and, at the same time, the willingness of partners across community groups to work together toward a solution.** Families with young children are struggling to find the child care they need to support parents' work schedules. When parents do find child care, it is often too expensive and not always the quality they desire. Child care issues have translated into workplace challenges, with employers recognizing that the lack of available child care has hampered their business' productivity, growth, and ability to recruit and retain staff. Both working parents and employers agree that parents' ability to meet child care needs impacts the local economy. They also agree that Emmet County businesses can and should participate in a solution to the child care crisis.

Data from child care providers indicate that low child care availability is inextricably linked to low wages and the lack of benefits for care providers. Fortunately, it seems employers are largely willing to join government leaders, nonprofits, and other advocates in the effort to actualize a vision for a local child care system where parents can find and afford quality care and at the same time, child care providers can receive the compensation they deserve.

Below we outline **key findings** from each of our three samples:

### **Employer Survey**

1. Most employers (72%) recognize the struggle their employees face finding child care.
2. Approximately one-half (51%) reported that their businesses have had a more difficult time recruiting qualified staff as a result of inadequate child care, and over 60% feel the productivity of their business has been affected due to child care issues.
3. Many employers (39%) offer flexibility in scheduling and remote work options to accommodate working parents, but there is opportunity to increase their awareness of other ways they could support employees.
4. The majority (66%) of business leaders report an interest in learning about ways to better support the child care needs of working families in the area.

### **Parent and Prospective Parent Survey and Focus Groups**

1. The most commonly reported child care issue among parents was a lack of available options. Parents shared that they had been on waitlists for years, sometimes without ever hearing back.
2. Parents who participated in focus groups shared that they are seeking higher quality care than they can find with the available options.
3. Most parents surveyed (67%) are using child care services. Of those, 62% are using child care centers. When looking for care, parents tend to prefer child care centers over in-home options.
4. More than one-third of families pay over \$1,000 a month for care, and almost all families pay for care out of pocket. Rates this high are considered unaffordable,<sup>5</sup> even for our survey sample that skews higher income.
5. Sixty-three percent of parents and prospective parents viewed their employer as being “family friendly” and valued the remote working and flexible scheduling options many employers provide.
6. Most parents and prospective parents (69%) feel comfortable discussing their caregiving responsibilities with employers, but 81% report that their employers have not collected information about this formally or systematically.
7. Many parents (40%) have used flexible scheduling and remote working options to accommodate some of their care needs. However, some parents (17%) had turned down promotions or reduced work hours (22%) because of a lack of child care. Fortunately, few had been fired or demoted for these reasons (3%).

### **Child Care Provider Survey**

1. Most child care providers (73%) in Emmet County are motivated by their passion for working for children, considering child care as their “calling.” Yet on current salaries, many providers struggle to pay their bills. Most employees at child care businesses (87%) are earning \$13-21 an hour.
2. Many providers are unaware of exactly how their pay is determined (47%), most do not know what they could potentially earn (93%), and most (60%) were unsure what it would take to earn a higher wage.

3. Child care providers, overall, expressed a great deal of job clarity and role consistency.
4. There is a culture of learning among Emmet County’s child care providers. Many providers are currently, or are interested in, furthering their education/credentialing. Most (80%) believe doing so could lead to increases in pay.

## METHODOLOGY

The team sought to understand the child care landscape from a variety of perspectives. To do so, we surveyed three populations: local employers, parents and prospective parents of children, and child care providers.

We distributed the surveys in a number of ways. We leveraged an advisory team, consisting of 11 community members from the local Chamber of Commerce, local nonprofit organizations, businesses, child care centers, the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, and other local institutions. We also distributed the survey via social media, posted flyers throughout the community in high-traffic areas, and reached out personally to existing child care providers as needed.

Below we summarize the number of survey responses we received from each research population:

SURVEY POPULATION	RESPONSES
Employers	96
Parents and Prospective Parents	271
Child Care Providers	25

In addition to our surveys, the team completed seven focus groups with a total of 29 parents and prospective parents to gather qualitative data and learn from their experiences in order to more deeply understand their needs and desires relating to child care. Participants received a \$50 gift card for their time, and focus groups occurred in various formats (remote/in person), at locations in which participants felt comfortable sharing about their lives (i.e. the public library and college), and at multiple times of day to attempt to accommodate participants’ schedules and needs.

# EMPLOYER SURVEY

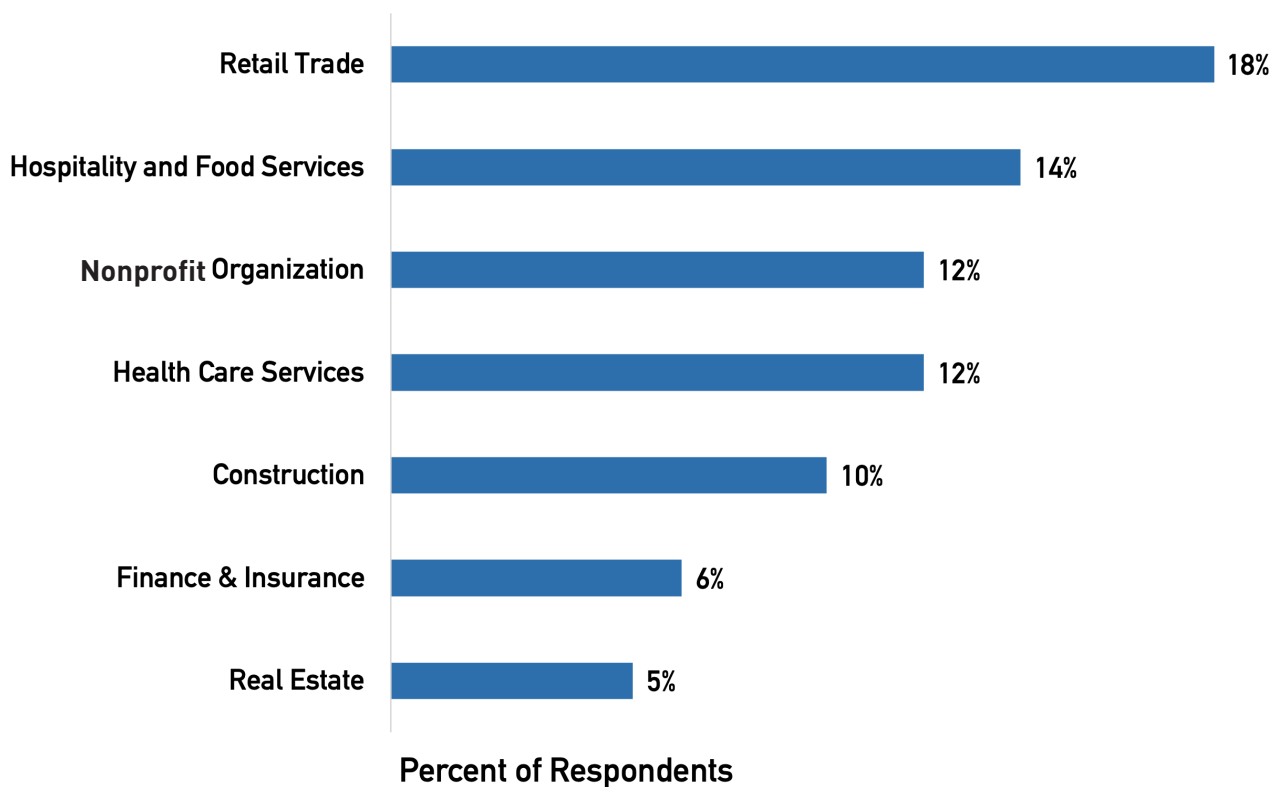
The objectives of this portion of the study include:

- How employers perceive the child care landscape in the community
- Their employees' needs for child care
- The impact of workers' child care challenges on businesses' performance
- The types of benefits employers were currently offering to employees to assist with child care needs, and
- How interested employers were in assisting their employees with child care needs in the future

## SURVEY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The team collected 96 responses from owners, administrators, or human resource directors across the Little Traverse region.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the employers (64%) were small to medium-sized business owners (25 employees or less), with the largest subset coming from the retail sector (18%). We also received a significant share of responses from the hospitality and food services, health care, nonprofit, and construction sectors. About 20% of employer respondents fell into "Other" industry types, which include government, K-12 education, and more; industries were included in the "other" category if fewer than 5% of respondents run businesses in the industry. Sixty percent of all business representatives worked in Petoskey, with the remaining largely coming from Harbor Springs.

**Figure 1: Employer Industry Type**

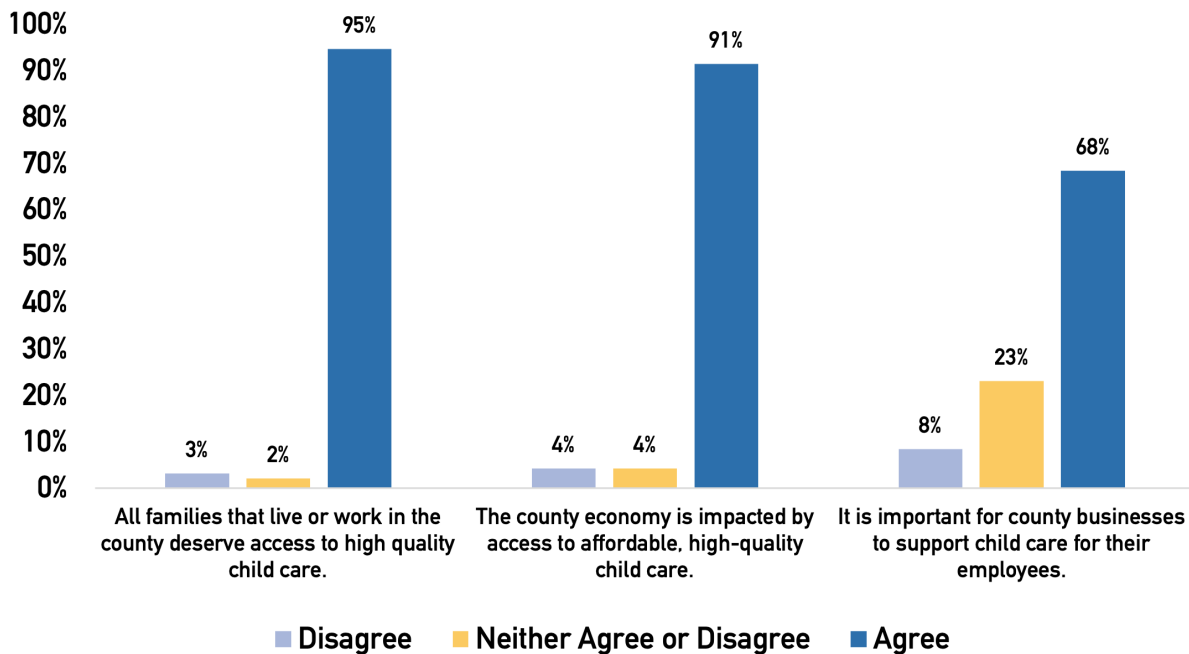


# FINDINGS

## Employers believe they are aware of their employees' child care needs and want to help.

The majority of employers (86%) agreed that Emmet County businesses will continue to face workforce shortages without access to affordable early child care. Approximately 90% of employers believed they were aware of child care shortages in the Little Traverse Region and 86% agreed that increasing access to child care should be a priority for the community. The vast majority (95%) of employers agreed that families deserve access to high quality child care and 91% believe that the issue affects the local economy overall.

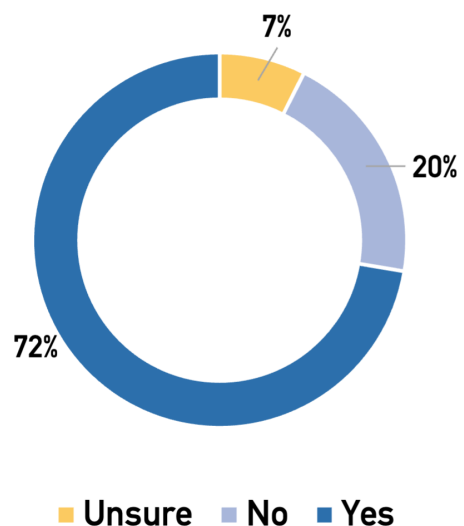
**Figure 2: Employer Opinions about Child Care**



Two-thirds of employers surveyed thought businesses should support child care for employees, while nearly one-quarter didn't have strong feelings on the issue. We did not see a difference in responses to this question by size of employer.

Seventy-two percent of employers said their employees struggled to find child care. Eighty-three percent of employers cited overall availability and 76% cited cost as barriers their employees face in receiving child care.

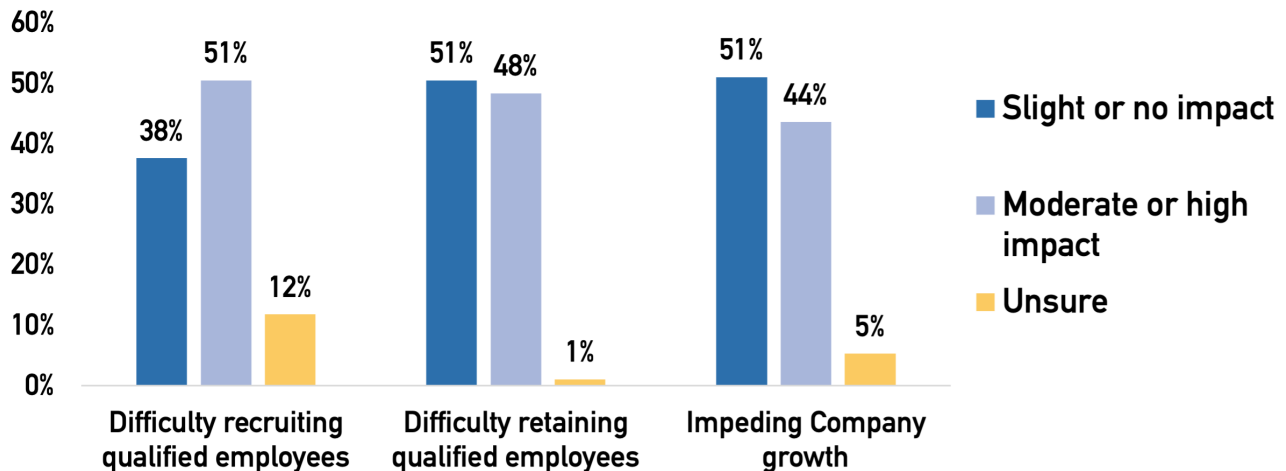
**Figure 3: Do your employees struggle to find child care?**



**Employers believe that child care shortages have negatively impacted both their own businesses and the local economy.**

A majority of employers (62%) said child care issues had negatively affected their overall business productivity. Their concerns about the economic impact of inadequate child care echo national trends. A 2021 [Harvard Business Review article](#) shared that pre-pandemic, “inadequate child care was costing working parents \$37 billion a year in lost income and employers \$13 billion a year in lost productivity.”<sup>7</sup> When asked about hiring, about one-half of employers said inadequate child care affected their ability to recruit and retain qualified employees.

**Figure 4: Business Impact of Inadequate Child Care**



**The most common form in which employers sought to accommodate employee child care needs was through flexible scheduling, paid time off (PTO), and work from home options. However, most aren't aware of additional ways to support their employees with child care.**

The majority of employers surveyed (80%) offer at least one benefit that allows employees a flexible work schedule to accommodate their child care needs or assists them in paying for child care, while the average number of benefits offered is slightly under two. As we might expect, larger employers tend to offer more child care benefits than those with fewer employees.

In addition, larger businesses were more likely to offer paternity leave, maternity leave, an Employee Assistance Program that helps employees work through personal challenges that may impact work performance,<sup>8</sup> and dependent care flexible spending accounts. The most common benefits offered by employers were flexible schedules and work from home options, the ability to use PTO for child care issues, and paid maternity leave.

There are other supports available that employers are underutilizing. For example, the State of Michigan launched a bipartisan program called [Tri-Share](#) in 2021 that divides the cost of child care into equal thirds between employers, employees, and the state, with the split in cost coordinated by a regional facilitator hub. However, the majority of employers (72%) were unfamiliar with Tri-Share, and only one employer who responded to the survey said they participated in the program, which is facilitated by the United Way of Northwest Michigan in Emmet County.<sup>9</sup> Very few employers who responded to the survey (6%) use the [Federal Employer-Provided Child Care Credit](#), a resource that



allows employers to claim up to \$150,000 in tax credits on many of the expenses associated with supporting their employee's child care needs.<sup>10</sup> Two-thirds of employers indicated their interest in exploring additional ways to support working families and child care. This suggests that many employers in the region would be interested in learning about the full range of ways to support employees' child care needs.

### **Many employers want to be a part of the child care solution for their employees and offered several ideas, largely focusing on increasing supply of care.**

We asked employers what they believed would help address workforce child care issues for their businesses. Employers most often highlighted the need for more child care options and providers. They offered several suggestions to increase supply. For example, they suggested organizing a nanny-share program, supporting the provision of child care within the school system through a millage, offering onsite care at large employment locations, and increasing pay for child care workers.

Employers also cited more affordable care and extended morning and evening hours as solutions to care challenges, particularly due to the concentration of service businesses in the area. Others suggested more support for employers, including information about the [Child Development and Care subsidy program](#) and funding for employer-offered child care. Several employers pointed to the need for broader policy changes, including access to affordable housing for local workers and creating higher-paying jobs so parents can better afford existing child care options.

## **PARENT AND PROSPECTIVE PARENT SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS**

We asked employers to distribute a separate survey to the employees in their organizations. This survey aimed to understand how parents of children 5 years and younger and prospective parents in the Little Traverse area are managing their child care needs and identifying their most salient issues, preferences, and concerns.<sup>11</sup> We also sought to understand what working parents receive from their employers as far as assistance with child care and what types of benefits might be most useful in the future.

In addition to the survey, the team completed seven focus groups including a total of 29 parents to gather data about their child care experiences and to more deeply understand their needs and desires relating to child care.

## **SURVEY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

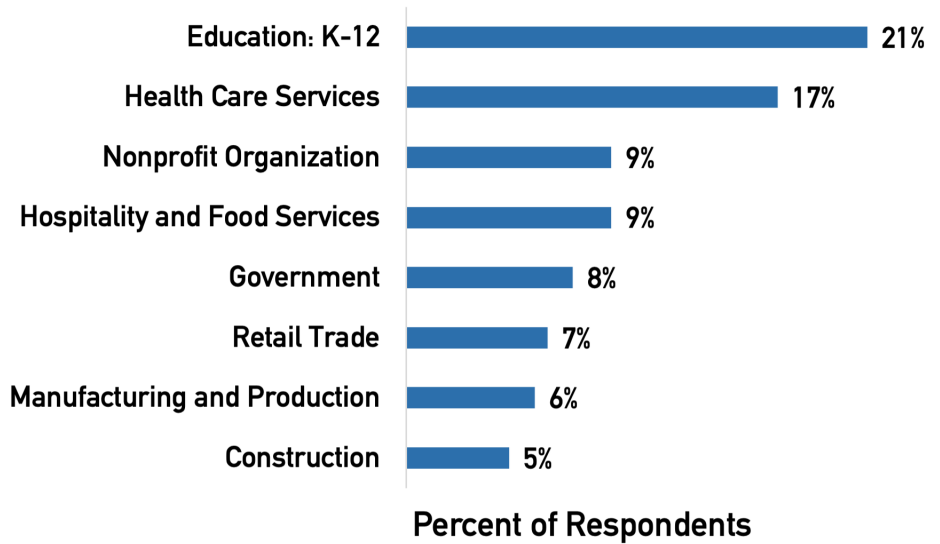
The team collected 271 responses from parents and prospective parents. Because surveys were largely distributed through employers, most of our sample were working parents and prospective parents, with 81% working full-time and 11% working part-time. The largest shares of our responses came from those working in the K-12 education and health care sectors. About 18% of parent and prospective parent respondents fall into "Other" employment sectors, which included child care,

agriculture and forestry, and architecture and engineering, among other sectors; industries were included in the “other” category if fewer than 5% of respondents worked in the industry.

Across our sample, 86% of respondents had dependent children or were responsible for the care of children 5 or younger. The other 14% were prospective parents who expected to have a baby, adopt, or foster a child under 5 within

the next two years. The vast majority of respondents (81%) identified as female and 90% as White/Caucasian. The respondent population skews higher income, with more than half (55%) of households earning \$90,000 or more per year in pre-tax dollars. This is higher than the median household income for families with children under 18 across Emmet County (\$77,946) and higher than the median household income of all Emmet County residents (\$63,488).<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 5: Working Parent Employment Sector**

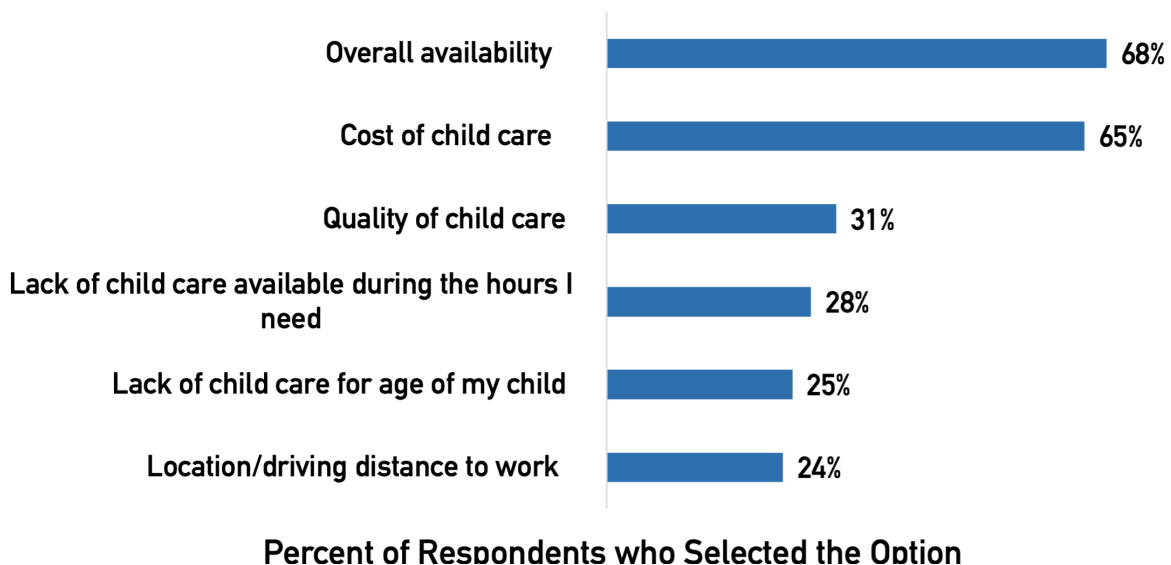


## FINDINGS

### A lack of child care availability was the issue cited by most parents.

We asked respondents to select the top three child care issues affecting them most. Overall availability was chosen most frequently, followed closely by the cost of care. In Michigan, we know there are about four children under 12 years of age for every available child care spot, and

**Figure 6: Child Care Challenges Selected as a Primary Issue by Parents**



areas with the least child care availability tend to be in rural areas and concentrated in Northern Michigan, like Emmet County.<sup>13</sup>

Focus group participants explained the struggle they face, including signing up for waitlists at various child care centers and sometimes waiting for years. One parent told us, “I put [my child] on a waitlist three months into my pregnancy, and she was on a waitlist for four years.” Others underscored the lack of options for parents searching for care in their community. A mother at one focus group shared, “I just found it was very hard, and when I went and did a search for daycares in the area that were not home daycares, there’s really only three choices, and that was it. And you have all these kids in this area that have to fit within these three choices, and they just don’t have the staff to take care of the kids is what’s more upsetting.”

### **Parents are highly concerned about the quality of care available for their children.**

Thirty-one percent of parents surveyed told us that quality of available care is an issue for their family. Parents in our focus groups who were searching for care were concerned that they may not be able to find what they were looking for. One mother told us, “I’m new at this search for child care, but as I said, I would like a place where they can actually learn and not just be entertained.” Parents wanted age-appropriate learning opportunities, with one mother explaining, “I don’t want my children to be in front of a screen all the time or just having play time all day long. It is important that they learn something. Even if they’re 2 years [old], learn eyes, nose, mouth, whatever is appropriate for their age.” Two mothers said they were searching for a place that is able to care for a child with special needs. When spots are so few and far between, parents either have to, or worry they will have to, compromise on the ideal characteristics of the setting to which they send their child.

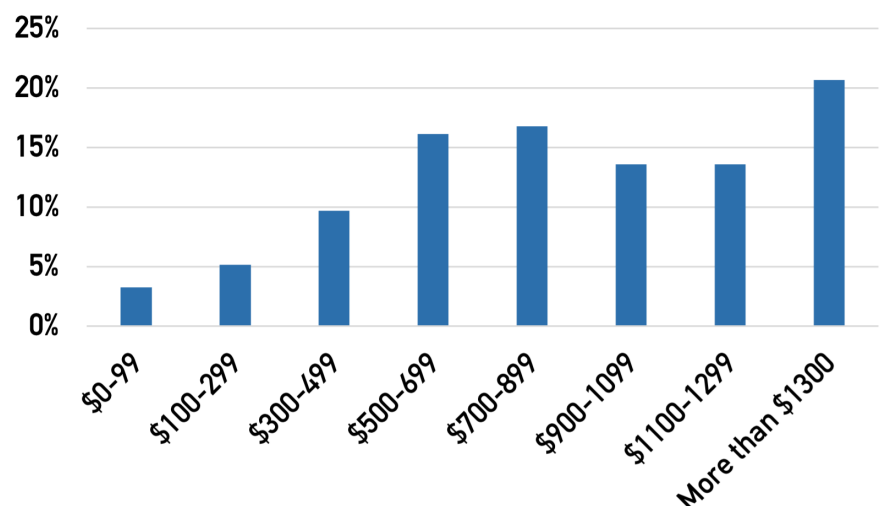
### **While most families with higher incomes relied on child care centers, those with lower incomes were more likely to turn to friends, family and neighbors for child care.**

Across all working parents of young children surveyed, 67% were currently using child care services. The greatest share of parents (62%) were using a child care center. Unpaid family, friends, and neighbors (35%) and in-home care (30%) were the second and third most frequently-used options. Families earning \$59,000 or less were more likely to use unpaid care from friends, families, and neighbors compared to families with higher incomes.

### **Parents often prefer child care centers to in-home options.**

During focus groups, we heard that many parents prefer child care centers to in-home options. Parents tended to perceive child care centers as facing higher regulatory standards

**Figure 7: Distribution of Respondents by Monthly Cost of Care**



than in-home centers and being more predictable in terms of daily activities and events. One parent shared, “I think I like centers. The homes that I’ve seen for care are kind of scary... I guess it’s not scary, but I think they’re more regulated in a center than it is in a home. If you go to a center, you know what to expect on a day-to-day basis. If they’re at home, anybody could show up at any time and you wouldn’t know the difference. It’s their home.” Others believed that child care centers would be less likely to shut down for the day when a caregiver was sick, offering more reliability for parents. Some parents perceived child care centers as being more “learning-based” than in-home centers and having more to offer children in terms of socialization.

### **Parents are paying more than what is considered affordable for child care.**

Parents are spending a significant portion of their monthly income on child care. More than one-third of families pay more than \$1,000 a month on care. Nearly everyone (97%) pays for child care out of pocket, with the minority of families receiving help from friends and family, their employer, or the government. For families earning even \$100,000-\$150,000, a monthly payment of \$1,000 would exceed what is considered affordable by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (7% of income).<sup>14</sup>

### **Most of Emmet County’s working parents view their employer as “family friendly.”**

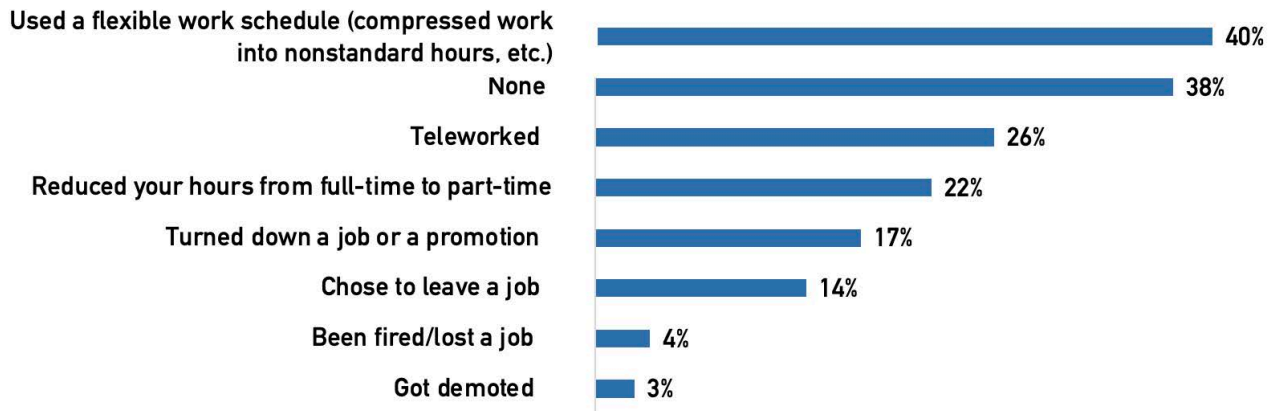
Most working parents (63%) and prospective parents view their employer as “family friendly.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, most (81%) report that their employer does not collect information regarding their child care needs. Potentially contributing to employees’ perceptions of working in a family friendly workplace, 69% of working parents felt either very or extremely comfortable speaking with their supervisor about their responsibilities for their children. This suggests that while employers may not formally assess child care needs, relationships are strong enough that employers and employees feel comfortable discussing their responsibilities outside of work.

### **Child care issues have cost parents time at work, but many parents have accommodated care needs by using a flexible schedule or remote working options.**

Child care issues have cost employees time at work, with 42% of respondents having missed six or more days in the past year. Almost all respondents had needed to arrive late to work (80%), leave early (84%), or spend work time on the phone (69%) taking care of child-related matters. Few respondents report having faced serious career consequences such as losing their job or getting demoted due to issues with child care. Some parents had, however, chosen to leave a job, reduce their hours, or turn down a promotion. A significant share of respondents had been able to work remotely and many had been able to use a flexible work schedule (working hours outside of the traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) when care challenges had arisen in the past.

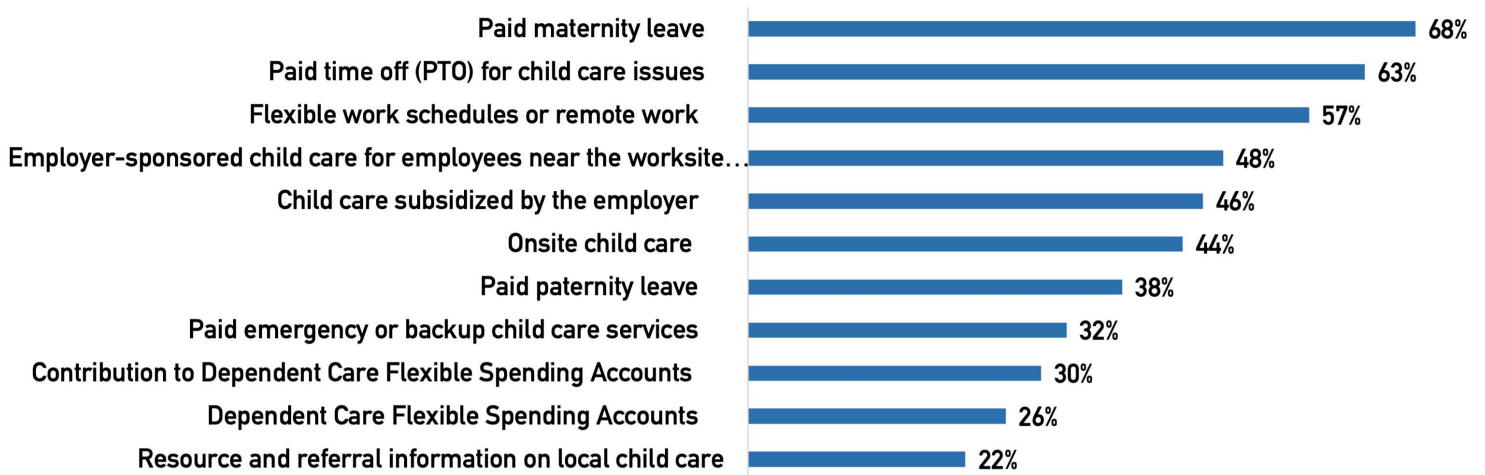
When asked which employer benefit would be useful to them, the top three most frequently selected were paid maternity leave, paid time off, and flexible work schedules or remote work. Parents and prospective parents were least interested in their employer offering Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts and resource referrals. In open-ended responses, numerous respondents suggested employers provide child care on site or reserve slots for their children with local providers.

**Figure 8: Experiences Parents Have Had Due to Child Care Issues**



Percent of Respondents who Selected the Option

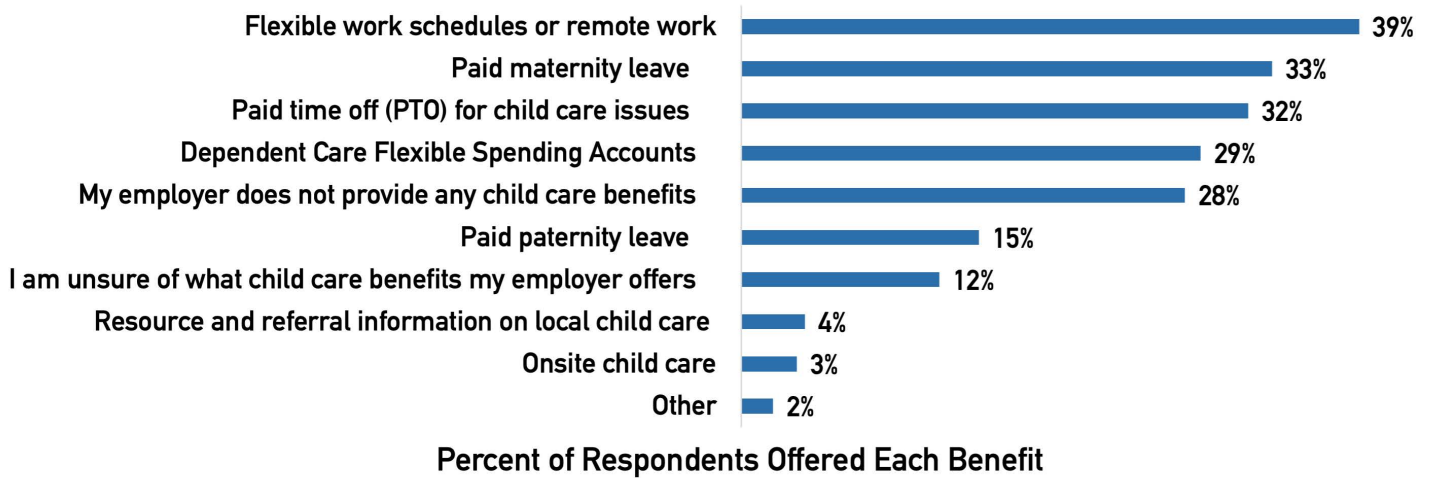
**Figure 9: Most Valuable Benefits an Employer Could Provide**



Percent of Respondents who Selected the Option

The three most commonly received benefits for respondents align with those most often selected as being valuable (though those requesting the service were not necessarily employed in the business that offered it). We saw that the working parents and prospective parents most commonly receive flexible work and remote work options, paid maternity leave, and PTO for child care issues. At the same time, the fourth most commonly selected benefit as being valuable to parents was employer-sponsored child care, a benefit none of the respondents were actually receiving. Additionally, we noticed that while the fewest respondents felt that receiving access to a Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account would be valuable, it was the fourth most frequently received benefit offered to responding working parents and prospective parents. Almost 30% of respondents shared that their employer did not offer a single child care benefit. Unsurprisingly, we saw a greater share of parents believing each type of child care benefit would be valuable than the share of parents actually receiving them.

**Figure 10: Benefits Offered to Parents**



Parents were optimistic about what having access to affordable child care could do for their careers. Most respondents (65%) believed that they would be better able to focus on work, and one-half expected they could take on more hours/responsibility at their job. Aside from the career benefits, a small share of families (2%) described that having access to affordable care would mean they could expand their family.

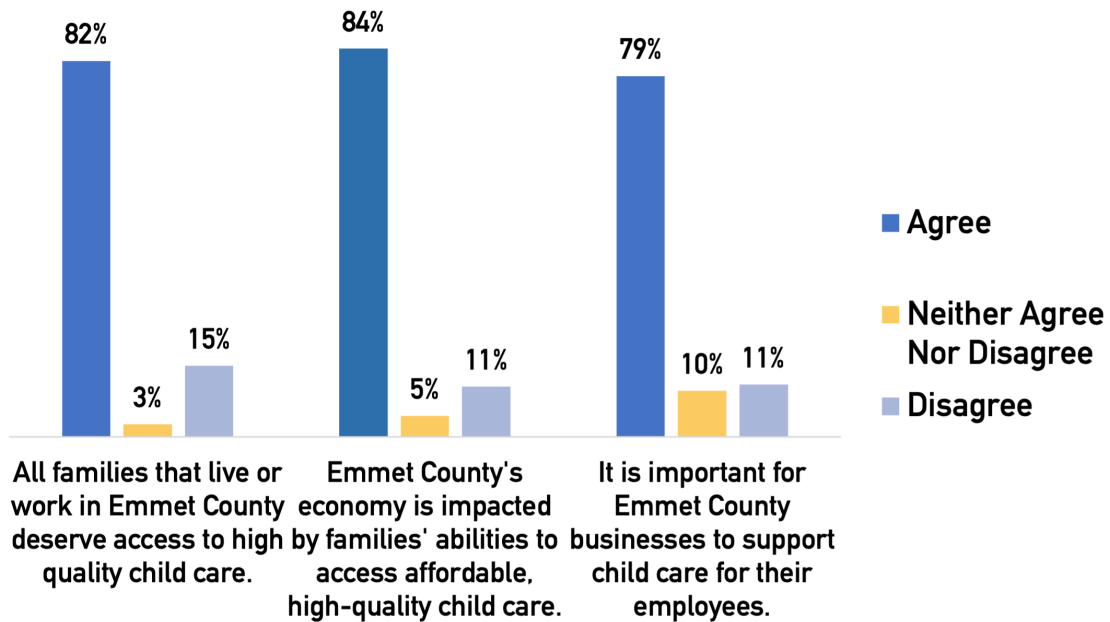
**Parents and prospective parents view child care access as integral to the local economy.**

Similar to the sentiment expressed by local employers, the majority (82%) of parents and prospective parents agree that “all families living or working in Emmet County deserve access to high quality child care.” More than 80% of respondents thought Emmet County’s economy had been impacted by families’ ability to access affordable, quality child care, and 79% of respondents believe it’s important for local businesses to play a role in supporting child care needs for their employees.

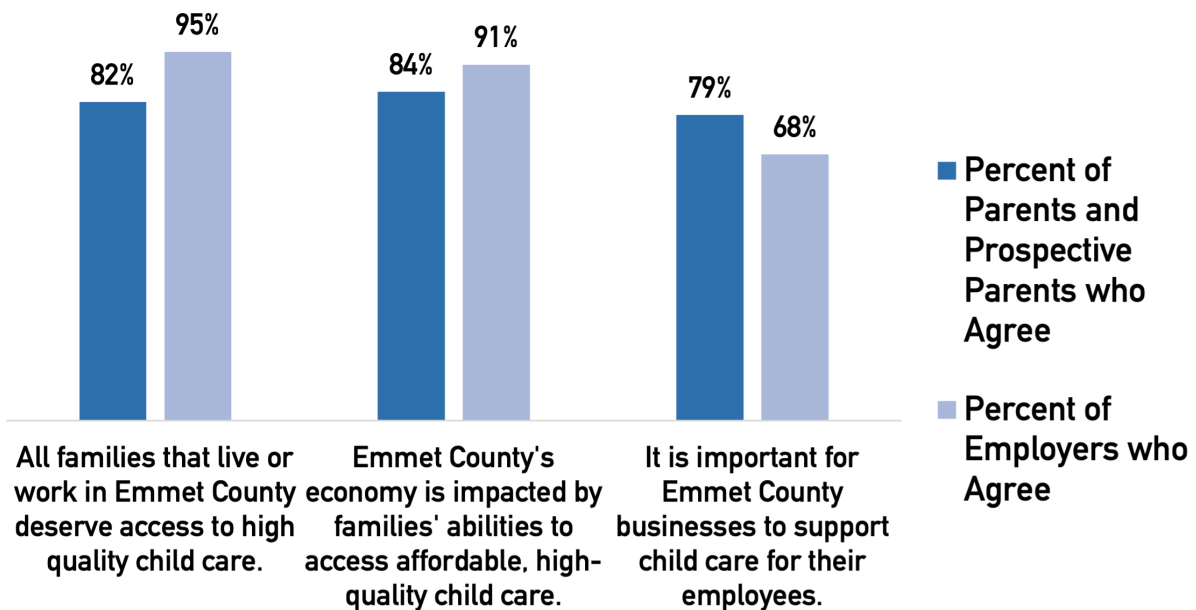
Without access to affordable early child care, parents and prospective parents overwhelmingly (85%) feel that local businesses will face workforce shortages now and in the future. Illustrating this point, one working parent shared:

*“But I mean the lack of child care is the reason [my partner and me] don’t have roots here. We don’t have a home because we don’t know if we’re staying here... I just had a conversation with, with [my partner] this weekend about whether or not we need to move because I don’t know how we could realistically, um, have children here.”*

**Figure 11: Parent and Prospective Parent Opinions about Child Care Access**



**Figure 12: Opinions on Child Care**



## CHILD CARE PROVIDER SURVEY

To understand the child care system from the provider perspective, the team sent surveys to administrators and caregivers at child care centers and in-home care locations throughout the county. The team relied on existing relationships, social media, and an advisory team of 11 community members to reach as many child care providers as possible.

The survey focused on understanding what types of wages and benefits child care providers earn at various local child care businesses. We also requested information about workplace characteristics and culture, such as transparency across pay scales and policies and procedures.

## **SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

The team collected 25 responses from child care providers. Most providers who responded were employees in an early care or education setting (15), and the remainder were program administrators, owners, or operators (six) or in-home child care providers (four).

The administrators, owners, and operators we surveyed employed teams of a range of sizes, from one employee to more than 20, and a majority (60%) were focused on hiring full-time staff.

Respondents had been in the business for three months to 14 years. The majority of child care employees who responded (73%) plan to work in early childhood education for the rest of their careers. Seventy-three percent worked at a child care center, and the remaining worked in a [Great Start Readiness Program](#) classroom or preschool. Seventy-one percent of employees were assistant teachers and 29% were lead teachers, and most worked with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Responding employees worked for nonprofit agencies, government-funded and public agencies, and private agencies, with the largest share (47%) working for a nonprofit agency. Most employees (80%) work year-round, while the remaining work on a traditional school calendar schedule.

### **Many child care professionals struggle to make ends meet.**

The child care employees included in our survey, overwhelmingly, were motivated by their passion for working with children rather than pay. Seventy-three percent of respondents consider child care to be their “calling.” Pay for these workers is low in Emmet County and across the state, particularly when compared to educators with similar levels of education in the K-8 system.<sup>16</sup> Across the state, early childhood educators earn 21.5% less than colleagues in the K-8 system and are 7.3 times more likely to live in poverty than Michigan K-8 teachers.<sup>17</sup>

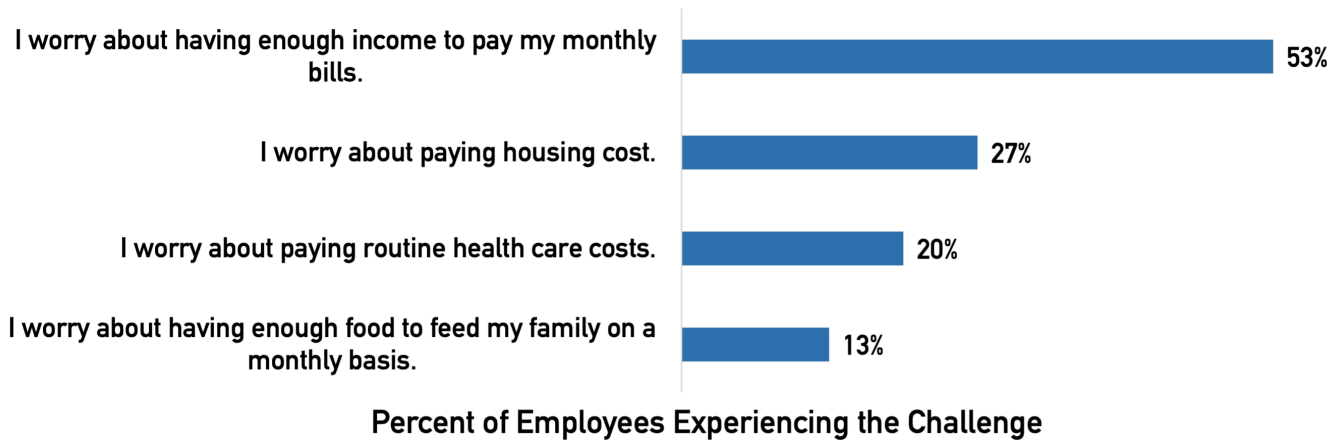
Child care employees surveyed earn between \$13-21 per hour with a minority earning a salary of \$50,000 or more per year. Seven out of 10 assistant teachers who responded were earning \$13-\$15 per hour while the remaining were earning \$16-18 per hour. Three teachers, two that identified as lead teachers, were paid \$19-21 hourly, and two others were making \$50,000 (approximately \$24 an hour at 40 hours a week for 52 weeks) or more on a salary.

Very few child care workers nationally receive job-based benefits like health insurance or a retirement plan. The Economic Policy Institute shared that “[j]ust 15.0 percent of child care workers have employer-sponsored health insurance through their own job, compared with 49.9 percent of workers in other occupations.”<sup>18</sup>

The most common job-based benefits survey respondents receive is a discount on child care for their own children and paid holidays. On these wages, most of the child care employees surveyed reported struggling to pay their monthly bills.



**Figure 13: Budgetary Challenges for Child Care Employees**



Three of the four in-home providers surveyed said they did not pay themselves an annual salary. Two of the four in-home providers purchased health insurance and other forms of insurance (dental and vision) through their child care business. One mentioned having insurance through their partner. Most in-home providers do take vacation (75%), but when they are sick, most (75%) said they would have to close for the day.

**Child care employees surveyed were unclear about the way their pay and raises were determined and what it might take to earn more.**

When asked what the basis for their rate of pay was, 47% of child care employees responded, “I don’t know.” Others believed pay was driven by level of education and experience. The vast majority of employees (87%) were unsure when their next pay increase would be. For those who did know, only one knew how much that next pay increase would be. We asked on which factors are pay increases at employees’ workplaces based, and 60% of respondents did not know. Others believed raises were based on evaluation and educational advancement, while one person believed seniority came into play. We also asked child care workers if their employer offered a “salary scale,” which would indicate the different levels of pay one could receive based on levels of education and years of experience. Only 13% said their program had a salary scale. Unsurprisingly, then, all but one employee was unsure of the highest rate of pay they could receive at their current employer. Although employees generally weren’t sure about how their wages and raises were determined, 80% were confident that gaining more credentialing would lead to increased pay at work.

**Child care employees, overall, had a great deal of job clarity and consistency.**

Nearly all employees surveyed said they had access to their job description (93%), were very clear about their job expectations (87%), had received a new employee orientation to their program and position (87%), and were aware of their program’s personnel policies and procedures (93%). Most employees were aware of their program’s mission and vision statement (67%), but still one-third either were unsure of it or said their program did not have such a statement. However, 80% of employees said their program had shared a set of core values or clear statements of expectations. Among the employees surveyed, only about one-half reported that at their workplace, there were routines for receiving feedback from administrators (53%) or giving feedback to program

administration (53%). Generally, employees felt that their programs offered adequate staffing levels, break times, curriculum planning time, and time to observe children.

### **There is a culture of learning among the child care professionals in Emmet County.**

Across child care employees surveyed, equal shares had earned bachelor's degrees (40%) and some college or associate degrees (40%). The minority of employees had earned levels of education either higher or lower than this. Professional development was popular among respondents, with employees reporting spending upwards of 24 hours a year on professional development. Almost one-half of employees (47%) were currently working toward a degree or credential, and among those who were not, 78% said they would be interested in doing so. Several of the professionals currently working toward a degree or credential were using scholarships such as the [T.E.A.C.H. scholarship](#) or the [MiReconnect](#) to help pay for school. All employees were enrolled in MiRegistry – a resource for tracking professional development, training, and career growth for early childhood and school-aged educators. One-third of employees were members of a professional organization, like Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children. Fortunately, all owners, operators, and administrators said they pay for at least some professional development for their staff, with 20% covering all expenses.

In-home care providers were not currently active in working toward a degree or credential, and only one-half said they would be interested in doing so. However, in-home providers were engaged in professional development, for a minimum of 10 hours across respondents. All in-home providers were enrolled in Mi-Registry and only one of the four were a member of a professional organization.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The results from surveys and focus groups illustrate the interconnectedness among the challenges facing parents, employers, and child care providers. For example, a lack of available child care is influenced by inadequate wages for child care professionals. At the same time, the low wages stem in part from the lack of affordability of care for parents. Challenges are intertwined and will need to be addressed in concert with one another when possible.

Collecting insights from employers, parents and prospective parents, and child care providers is a key step in narrowing down, with the help of community partners, the most relevant recommendations for action. In phases two and three of this study, we aim to find partners to support the implementation and evaluation of a selection of strategies reflecting the needs described by the community in this first phase of work.

In the table following, we describe recommendations for action we can explore and potentially pilot in later phases of the work. Additionally, we suggest anticipated outcomes for each recommendation.

Recommendation	Description	Anticipated Outcomes
Initiate and test a “true cost” fiscal model in a child care business	<p>The true cost of child care, in addition to standard costs such as licensing, facilities, and non-personnel items, includes living wages and benefits for all staff and owners. It also includes the cost of quality programming, and professional development, and assumes wages will increase with additional education and experience over time. A “true cost” fiscal model would include a budget for a child care provider that assumes rates reflect the true cost of care.</p> <p>The team at NCMC could support the transition of one or more existing providers to a true cost fiscal model and/or test the model in a new program.</p>	Increased <b>quality, capacity, and workforce</b>
Create a template with a variety of “family friendly” solutions for employers to offer employees	<p>Recognizing that not all employers have the capacity to financially contribute to an employee’s child care, we could create and share with employers a template of family friendly policies and solutions, including existing solutions like Tri-Share, to facilitate their engagement in addressing employees’ child care needs.</p> <p>Along with the creation of the template, we could launch an informational campaign for employers that will ensure employers fully understand resources that exist and are empowered to assist their employees in accessing them.</p>	Increased <b>accessibility and affordability</b> of child care for working parents in Emmet County.
Pilot an employer co-op model	An employer cooperative for care can take a number of forms. In one model, employers purchase child care slots for the employees at rates that reflect the true cost of care. This model allows the center to afford adequate wages and benefits for workers and avoid vacancy loss. Employers could establish their own policy and benefit structure for how much their employees pay for child care.	Increased <b>accessibility and affordability</b> of child care for working parents in Emmet County and increased <b>capacity</b> of the child care system.
Develop an early care & education resource hub	Employers (or others) could support a “hub” that provides shared services, workforce recruitment, a child care substitute pool, and support for early childhood education leadership. It does not directly ease the cost of care to families but secures the child care system. Model selection could be determined in partnership with the host organization.	Increased <b>accessibility</b> of child care for working parents in Emmet County and increased <b>capacity</b> of the child care system.

Recommendation	Description	Anticipated Outcomes
Develop salary scales for local child care providers that can be included in their budgeting processes	<p>According to Child Care Services Association, “Salary scales define expected earnings in a uniform way for an identified group of individuals. Scales have a series of levels, all with beginning and end points to promote fairness and transparency and are based on predetermined criteria.”<sup>19</sup></p> <p>NCMC could assist the local child care sector in developing wage scales to help child care professionals understand how earnings are determined, their wage potential, and the requirements necessary to move up the scale. We can take learnings from the planning efforts for wage scales in other states described by the Child Care Services Association and T.E.A.C.H. National Center.<sup>20</sup></p>	Increased <b>capacity</b> and <b>quality</b> within the local child care sector.
Facilitate parent education around child care topics	Bringing parents and prospective parents together to share information about child care options, support for paying for child care, and more could help ensure parents are able to leverage all existing tools available for making child care more affordable and accessible. We could supplement this effort with an information campaign to reach parents with similar information who are not able to attend gatherings.	Increased <b>accessibility</b> and <b>affordability</b> of child care.
Pilot a NCMC lab school	<p>Universities and colleges across the country have created Child Development Laboratories, or “lab schools,” that provide accredited, licensed and high-quality early education opportunities for the community while also using the classrooms for hands-on learning for college students earning a degree in early childhood education. The laboratory schools can also be used for interdisciplinary research.</p> <p>We propose the creation of a Child Development Laboratory at NCMC that will provide additional high quality child care for the community as well as inspire, prepare, and grow the local child care workforce.</p>	Increased <b>capacity</b> and <b>quality</b> within the local child care sector, increased <b>accessibility</b> to child care for Emmet County parents.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Statistic derived from: 2019 American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates, Table B17024, Great Start to Quality (GSQ) data download, 4/11/2022;  
Nadeau, S. et al. (2022, May 20). America's Child Care Deserts in 2018. *Center for American Progress*. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>
- 2 Nadeau, S. et al. (2022, May 20). America's Child Care Deserts in 2018. *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>
- 3 Lubrano, A. (2021, April 2). The pandemic exposed how Americans devalue child care. systemic racism and sexism are to blame. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. <https://www.inquirer.com/news/american-child-care-racismsexism-pandemic-20210327.html>
- 4 North Central Michigan College. *College, Community Foundation Join to Address Local Child Care Shortage*. (2023, March 22). <https://www.ncmich.edu/community-events/news-and-press-releases/ncmc-child-care-initiative.html>
- 5 According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, child care is considered affordable if it costs families no more than 7% of their household income. See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, "Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program." <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>
- 6 Owners, human resource directors and administrators could each complete the survey for the same company. To respect anonymity, we did not require respondents to identify their place of work. Thus, some companies might be over represented in the data while others might be under represented.
- 7 Childcare is a business issue (2021, November 24). *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/04/childcare-is-a-business-issue>
- 8 An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a program offered by an employer to help employees work through personal challenges that might be impacting work performance such as substance abuse, health and wellness, child care and more.
- 9 Mi Tri Share Child Care. SOM - State of Michigan. <https://www.michigan.gov/mwc/initiatives/mi-tri-share-child-care>
- 10 Shrove, J. (2022, July 26). Employer guide to childcare assistance and tax credits. *U.S. Chamber of Commerce*. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/employer-guide-to-childcare-assistance-and-tax-credits>
- 11 We defined prospective parents as those who expected to have a baby, adopt, or foster a child under 5 within the next two years.
- 12 Statistic derived from: 2019 American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates, Table B17024, Great Start to Quality (GSQ) data download, 4/11/2022  
Nadeau, S. et al. (2022, May 20). America's Child Care Deserts in 2018. *Center for American Progress*. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>

care-deserts-2018/

- 13 Lopez, B., Kling, K., Nothaft, A. (October 2022). *The Child Development and Care Subsidy: Challenges and Opportunities*. Poverty Solutions. <https://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/poverty2021/files/2023/03/Child-Care-Lopez-et-al.pdf>
- 14 7% of income spent on child care is considered the maximum amount that is affordable by US DHHS. See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, "Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program." <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>
- 15 For the purpose of the survey, we defined a family-friendly employer as having a work environment and policies that enable employees to effectively balance and fulfill both their work and family responsibilities.
- 16 Michigan -- Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020. CSCCE. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/michigan/>
- 17 Michigan -- Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020. CSCCE. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/michigan/>
- 18 Gould, E. (November, 2015). Child care workers aren't paid enough to make ends meet. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/child-care-workers-arent-paid-enough-to-make-ends-meet/#epi-toc-4>
- 19 Child Care Services Association. (2021). Child care and early education research connections. A look at salary/wage scales for the early childhood educator workforce. *Research Connections*. <https://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/138446>
- 20 Child Care Services Association. Child care and early education research connections. A look at salary/wage scales for the early childhood educator workforce. *Research Connections*. <https://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/138446>