

# Early Childhood Funding Commission

## July-August 2020 Public Web Survey Findings

### Overview

To inform the deliberations of the Governor's Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding, a public survey was posted to the Commission's webpage during July and August.

The survey was available in English and Spanish and was publicized through listservs across the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, Early Learning Council committees and subcommittees, early childhood advocacy organizations, and provider and community word of mouth. The survey was targeted toward early childhood providers, educators, community organizations, and families. Demographic information was not required to complete the survey; those who did provide demographic information tended to be early childhood service providers from across the state.

Survey responses were analyzed by staff from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development and Advance Illinois to synthesize main themes and subthemes and report them to Commission members. There were 253 English responses and 8 Spanish responses.

### Survey Questions

1. How can the State ensure better access to high-quality ECE and child care services in your community?
2. What are the things that make it difficult for you to find child care and early education programs in your community?
3. What should the Commission consider when thinking about how to improve access to child care and early education programs for all children birth to age five?
4. What else do you want the Commission to know or think about?

### Findings

Across survey questions and responses, several key themes consistently rose to the surface:

#### **Early childhood education and care services are not affordable for all who need them**

Respondents stated that accessing ECEC services is often cost prohibitive. Co-pays for low-income families qualifying for a subsidy can still be unaffordable for some; for others, their income may be too high to qualify but not high enough to cover the full cost of services. Free services funded through the Early Childhood Block Grant do not meet demand.

"For the price I pay to have my two kids in daycare it would pay for a second mortgage. It has put my husband in I into further debt because we've had to take out loans to cover the cost."

"In the community where I live, there are many high-quality preschools and child care options, the problem is that not everyone can afford them. Usually these programs end up being mostly for white kids, upper class. What we need is equal access to high-quality programs, the education and care that our children receive shouldn't be determined by how much money families make and what we can afford, it should be affordable for all regardless of their income."

### **Early childhood education and care services are not available for all who need them**

Respondents mentioned a lack of high-quality early childhood options in their community, citing long wait lists or limited space in existing programs. This response was more common among respondents who self-identified as living in a rural area.

“There is a serious shortage of child care in our community. I have a waiting list of 189, 108 of them being infants.”

“There needs to be more quality programs accessible with before and after care for working parents. Middle class does not get to access these due to scheduling, transportation, and short hours of programs.”

### **Compensation for early childhood professionals is inadequate and does not match professional requirements and expectations in the field.**

Respondents noted the contradiction inherent in high expectations associated with high quality services and poverty-level wages paid to early childhood teacher assistants, teachers, support staff, and others. Respondents noted significant challenges in recruiting and retaining an early childhood workforce necessary to meet demand for services.

“[A challenge is] Finding teachers that are willing to work for less than they would make at Walmart or McDonald's. So many child care providers rely upon either a partner's income or a second job to make a living. Having a bachelor's degree in early childhood should afford one a job with a living wage.”

“The childcare teacher shortage is real, and it is a huge problem for many centers. We cannot afford to pay for the level of qualification that is required, and we are unable to keep staff with low wages and low benefits. The qualifications need to be made more realistic or we need additional ways to increase the amount we can pay. If this is not changed soon, it is not a matter of if but when many centers close their doors and displace even more children and families.”

### **Other common themes include:**

- Additional early childhood funding can help to resolve the above challenges
- Early childhood education and care service schedules are not aligned to family work or school hours, making it more difficult for families to work while all children are on the same schedule
- Information about early childhood education and care options is not communicated or available in a way that is clear, consistent, or centralized

“Coordinate services at the State level so that it makes it easier to streamline funding and services at the local level. Build a collaborative network with all programs serving birth to five.”

“The design planned by the State of Illinois for Infants through Kindergarten will only improve when all parties caring for and educating our children will be treated equitably. The goal of equality and parity will be met when funding is the same or a fair grading or rating similar to the Circles of Quality are awarded to all and funds assigned appropriately. Basically, whatever the school receives for 10 months of care should be the same for licensed and highly qualified centers.”