Participatory Research with Minnesota Child Care Providers

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MINNESOTA CHILD CARE
Policy Research Partnership
Advancing Equitable Access to Early Care and Education

The Partnership

- Team members come from Child Trends, University of Minnesota, and MN Department of Human Services
- There is over a 20-year partnership between the team members, made up of researchers, policymakers, and the community

Project Overview & Background

Research topics

- Understanding ECE providers' engagement in professional development
- Supporting ECE providers' needs and preferences for professional development

Participatory Methods Spanning the Project

- *(Years 2-3) World Café Method*
  - Small round table set up with specific topics
  - Participants shift small groups and talk through various topics in small groups
  - Harvesting – sharing broader insights with the large group
- *(Year 4) Data walk integrated into World Café Method*
  - Sharing specific data points from the provider and parent surveys conducted as a larger part of this study

Participatory Topic & Findings (Year 2)

- *Questions*
  - What are the professional development supports needed to stay in the field?
  - How have virtual settings worked for you in providing child care?
- *Findings*
  - Streamlining communications and outreach
  - Providing PD in multiple formats (e.g., virtual, self-paced)
  - Providing PD that addresses pandemic related issues
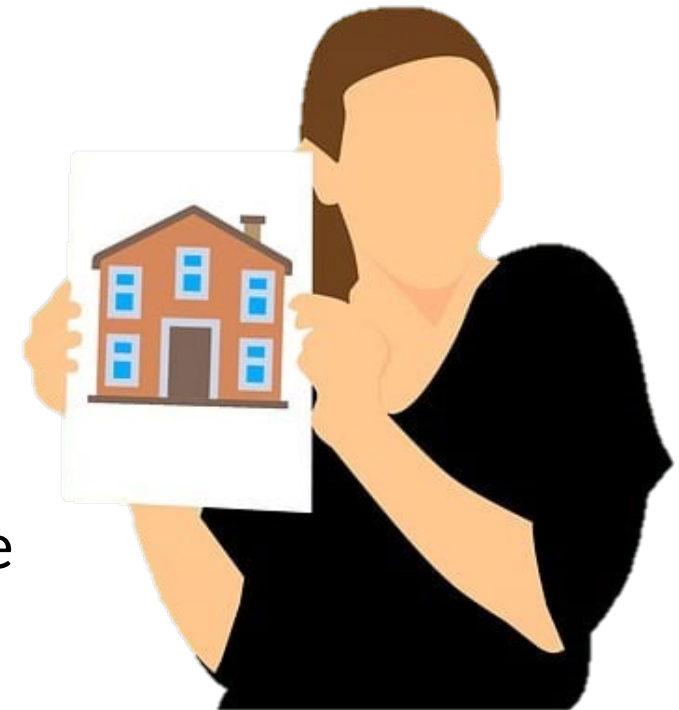 - Workforce development – creating early career pathways to the field

Participatory Topic & Findings (Year 3)

- *Questions*
  - What brought providers into the child care field
  - What is keeping providers in the field and motivating them to stay

- *Findings*
  - Desire for connection and mentorship with other providers
  - Support as business owners not only as child care providers
  - Inequities in home ownership and property taxes based on county/location

Data Walk World Café Method (Year 4)

1. Defining Access with the Access Framework
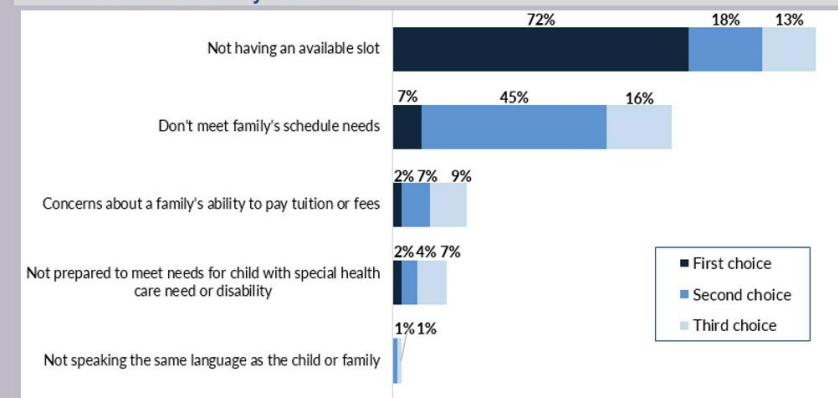

ACCESS TO CHILD CARE IS DEFINED AS...

REASONABLE EFFORT
- Availability of program/services
- Geographic location of program/ services
- Availability of information

AFFORDABLE
- Parents' financial and non-financial requirements to use services
- Availability of subsidies

MEET PARENTS' NEEDS/PREFERENCES
- Convenient hours of operating
- Preferred program type
- Transportation

SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT
- Quality of the program
- Individualized supports and/or specialized services for children
- Staff use children's home languages

2. Describing data points from the provider and family perspective for each dimension of the access framework

MEETS PARENTS' NEEDS
SECURING SLOTS

Figure: Top five reasons providers were unable to serve some families

Majority of providers said that the top reason it was challenging to serve families was because they did not have an available slot. The second reason is a mismatch of schedules to meet family's needs.
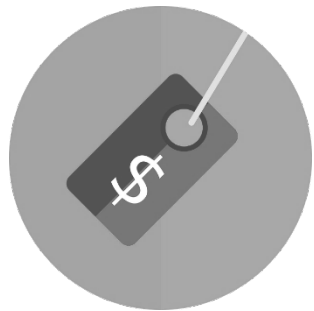
- Not having an available slot — 72%, 18%, 13%
- Don't meet family's schedule needs — 7%, 45%, 16%
- Concerns about a family's ability to pay tuition or fees — 2% 7% 9%
- Not prepared to meet needs for child with special health care need or disability — 2% 4% 7%
- Not speaking the same language as the child or family — 1% 1%

Legend:
- First choice
- Second choice
- Third choice

Source: Child Trends' analysis of data from the Minnesota Child Care Provider Survey (2021).

Reasonable Effort

- Families have various scheduling needs – often wanting extended care and locations closer to work or home

- Providers try to accommodate families but have struggled with having enough staff to cover shifts and the additional scheduling needs (issue became more challenging during COVID-19).

Affordability

- COVID created challenges for programs often limiting class sizes and impacting costs. Now prices have risen and programs have had to increase costs for families.

Findings (year 4)

Meeting Parent's Needs & Preferences

- Providers have tried to find creative solutions to offer transportation but ended up canceling them due to cost and hassle

Supporting Children's Development

- Though providers are often required to meet with parents 2 times a year, they often share information about the child more informally

Implications

- Research
  - Lack of measures that understand access from the provider's perspective
- Policy
  - Support in accessing food and subsidy assistance for programs
  - Grants and supports to increase wages for providers
- Practice
  - Working with local organizations to support parent's needs and children's development

Participatory Research to Expand on Survey Findings

- The participatory research built on initial findings about access and financial assistance
- Collaboration and next steps with MN's Dept of Human Services
  - Merging of assistance and scholarship programs
  - Streamlining subsidy processes to support providers