



Child care use in Minnesota

2009 statewide survey summary

Nearly 500,000 households in Minnesota include a parent or parents with at least one child age 12 and under. About three-quarters use some type of child care. The strength of our economy depends on families having high-quality, affordable child care, so parents can work and children have the early learning opportunities they need to perform better in school and later in the workforce.

To better serve parents and their children, The Minnesota Department of Human Services commissioned a study by Wilder Research to inform, develop and assess Minnesota's child care policies and programs, with particular attention to choices and challenges among low-income households for high-quality care.

This summary highlights key findings from the study, including current use and types of care, accessibility, and choices and challenges, especially among low-income families. It also proposes recommendations to ensure that high quality, affordable child care is available for all families who need it.

About the survey

In this study, child care includes informal home-based care by family (other than parents), friends and neighbors; licensed home-based care; center-based care (including preschool, nursery school, before and after school-care); organized activities and self-care. The study included 1,209 randomly selected households (308 surveyed in the summer and 901 during the school year). It was stratified by region (Greater Minnesota) and county (Twin Cities metro area). This is the third survey of child care use in Minnesota conducted by Wilder Research since 1999.

Key findings:

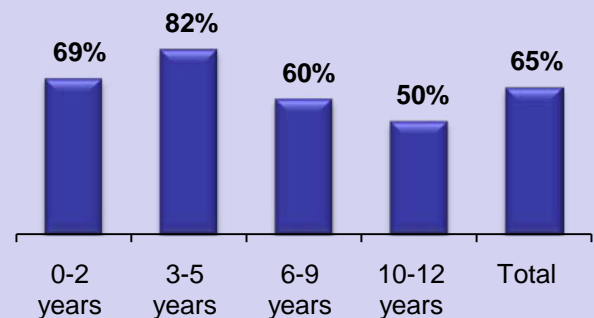
Child care use: Complex and varied

Arrangements are somewhat complex for most parents, involving multiple providers in different combinations at different times, including turning to a family member, friend or neighbor who provides at least some regular child care.

- Four out of five households use two or more child care providers.
- Twenty-four percent of working parents' work schedules vary from week to week.

PERCENTAGE OF MINNESOTA CHILDREN IN CHILD CARE

Of the estimated 908,000 children age 12 and under living in Minnesota, 65 percent are regularly in some type of child care arrangement, and 25 percent are in child care full time. On average, children spend about 22 hours per week in child care.

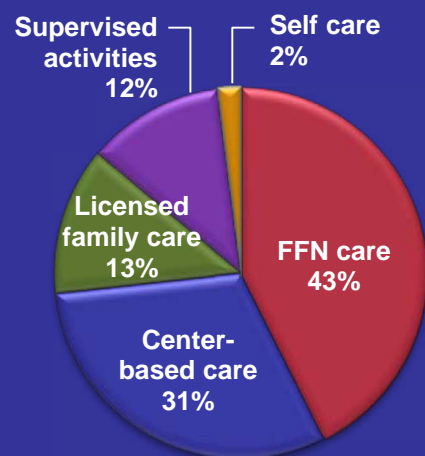


CHILD CARE USE AT A GLANCE

Of households who use child care:

- 70% use some form of family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care on a regular basis; 20% exclusively. For children under age 6, FFN care is more commonly provided by grandparents. For children age 6 to 12, FFN care is more often provided by older siblings.
- 31% use center-based care as their primary arrangement, including child care centers, preschools, Head Start and before-school and after-school programs.
- 69% of families pay something out-of-pocket for child care. For those paying for child care, the average out-of-pocket weekly expense for all children is \$138 (\$7,167 per year).
- Of those using FFN care 38 percent pay for it.

PRIMARY CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN AGE 12 AND YOUNGER



- In addition to standard weekday hours during the school year, 43 percent of children are regularly in non-parental care during weekday evenings (6 p.m. to 10 p.m.), and 33 percent are regularly in non-parental care on weekends. Seven percent of children are in non-parental care after 10 p.m. on weekdays, and 9 percent before 7 a.m. Family, friends and neighbors are the usual caregivers during these times.
- During the school year, more than two-thirds of children are in the care of FFN at least part of the time (69%), followed by center-based care (50%), supervised activities (46%), licensed family child care (14%) and self care (14%). During the summer, more children use FFN care (77%) and fewer use center-based care (31%).
- Center-based care use during the school year is highest for 3- to 5-year-olds (76%), followed by children age 6 to 9 (45%) and children under age 3 or age 10 to 12 (34%). FFN care use is highest for children under age 3 (76%).
- Supervised activities during the school year are more common child care arrangements for children age 6 to 9 (58 %) and those 10 to 12 (63 %), compared with 3- to 5-year-olds (47%).
- Forty-four percent of children age 10 to 12 are in self care regularly during the school year, compared with 15 percent of children age 6 to 9.
- During the summer, 36 percent of children age 10 to 12 (down from 42% five years ago) and 15 percent of children age 6 to 9 are in self care.

Selecting child care: Choices and challenges

Parents consider quality important and want more information on it. At the same time, many report they have to settle for what they can get.

- From a list of important considerations in choosing child care, “a caregiver rated high quality,” and “a caregiver who speaks your family’s native language” are the top “very important” reasons overall (77%), higher than a “reasonable cost” (71%).
- Most parents give high ratings to the quality of their primary child care arrangement. When asked specifically about why they choose their current primary provider, the top four reasons cited are: location (33%), cost (25%), quality (21%) and trust (20%).
- Eighty-eight percent (similar to 2004) say they would find it helpful if their community had a child care quality rating system that would give them information they could use for selecting the highest quality care.
- Parents of color (67 % versus 51% of white parents) and parents with low incomes (61 % versus 45 % of parents with higher incomes) are more likely to say a quality rating system would be “very helpful.”
- For households using FFN care, preference for care by a family member is a main reason. The structure and the activities are key to those choosing center-based care and supervised activities.
- Among all parents, parents of color are more likely than white parents to report feeling they had to take whatever arrangement they could get (44 % versus 27 %), and so are those whose primary language is not English (48 % versus 29%).

- Parents with children who have special needs are also more likely to feel they had to take what they can get (38% versus 26% of parents with no children with special needs).
- Compared to parents using center-based care and licensed family homes as their primary arrangements, parents using FFN care as their primary arrangement tend to be more satisfied with the flexibility of their child care arrangement.
- Parents using center-based and licensed family homes as their primary arrangements, on the other hand, tend to rate their child care providers' use of a curriculum and formal education or training higher than those parents using FFN care as their primary arrangement.
- Half of the parents who use self-care as their primary arrangement for 10 to 12-year-olds say they use it due to cost.
- Thirty-five percent of households with low incomes say that in choosing child care they had to take whatever arrangement they could get, compared with 26 percent for higher income households.
- Fourteen percent of households with low incomes (at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines) report currently receiving a subsidy through CCAP, Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program.
- Thirty percent of parents using CCAP report having to take whatever child care they could get, an improvement over the 2004 survey and similar to what higher-income parents report.
- Families with low incomes who do not receive a child care subsidy are more likely to use FFN care as their primary arrangement (60%) than low income families with a subsidy (31%) or households with higher incomes (37%).
- In 2009, 46 percent of households with low incomes receiving CCAP use center-based care as their primary arrangement. That compares with 22 percent of households with low incomes without CCAP and 33 percent for higher income households.
- Families with child care subsidies are more likely than other low income families to report their child care helps prepare their child for school. In this way, households receiving subsidies are more similar to households with higher incomes.

Low-income families: Child care is even more challenging

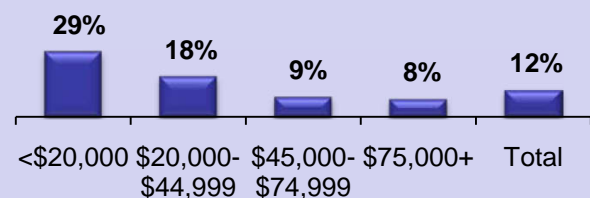
Twenty-eight percent of households with children age 12 and younger are low-income (at or below 200% of the federal poverty level – about \$44,000 for a family of four). Low-income families report even greater challenges in making satisfactory child care arrangements. Some families receive help paying for child care through government assistance, but many families with low incomes are not receiving these supports.

- Child care problems more commonly affect employment for parents with low-incomes (20%), parents of color (25%) and parents who have a child with a special need (21%) than other parents by about 2 to 1.

Note: Eligibility for CCAP is based on family size, family income, and participation in authorized employment-related activities by the parents. This survey does not contain information that explains the reasons for not using CCAP or to determine whether the households with low incomes not receiving child care assistance are eligible to receive it under current guidelines.

PROPORTION OF ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME GOING FOR CHILD CARE COSTS

Families with low incomes in Minnesota pay, on average, 20 percent of their income for child care arrangements — more than double the proportion paid by families with higher incomes (9%) and double the amount considered affordable. In households with the lowest annual incomes (below \$20,000), 29 percent of income goes for child care expenses.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the results of this study and discussion with the study advisory committee:

Continue public and private efforts to empower parents to make informed child care choices
Continue to support efforts to ensure child care information is available to parents through programs and initiatives such as CCR&R services and a quality rating system. Ensure that child care information is accessible in multiple formats and languages.

Develop the supply of high-quality child care options
High-quality child care options can be developed by supporting the professional development of and specialized training for child care providers, offering providers incentives to improve the quality of their care and empowering parents to make informed decisions about their child care choices.

Increase public and private ways to help families, especially those with low-incomes, access high-quality child care

Those able to access and use state child care assistance fare much better with regard to choice, satisfaction and use of licensed child care. Ways to increase access to high-quality child care options include increasing the availability of scholarships to be used in quality early care and education settings, increasing the use of CCAP, increasing incentives that link child care assistance payments to quality settings, ensuring that reimbursement rates for child care reflect the market, developing policies that emphasize continuity of care for children receiving CCAP and increasing the use of earned income tax credits, child care tax credits and pre-tax child care expense accounts through employers.

Continue to support and expand ways to improve the quality of family, friend and neighbor caregivers and connect them to appropriate resources
Families still rely on grandparents and other relatives for affordable, convenient, and trustworthy child care, especially for children under age 3. To ensure that all children are cared for in language-rich, safe and developmentally-appropriate environments, reach out especially to FFN that provide full-time child care.

Support programs throughout Minnesota that provide supervised, developmentally appropriate activities for pre-teens

Youth are at risk in several ways when they are not engaged in structured, supervised activities during non-school hours. Youth may worry, experience loneliness or miss opportunities to develop important social skills or to engage in positive development opportunities. They may also engage in risky behaviors that diminish their success in school. The relatively high and steady proportion of pre-teens providing self care throughout the year points to the need for more supervised activities and programs for 10- to-12-year-olds during the summer and after school.

Learn more

The full report and a series of fact sheets is available, including:

- Key trends
- Child care hours and types of care
- Child care choices, quality and cost
- Child care for families with low incomes
- Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) child care
- Child care for children with special needs
- Children and working parents

Download them from Wilder Research, www.wilderresearch.org or Minnesota Department of Human Services at www.dhs.state.mn.us.

For more information

This summary presents highlights of *Child Care Use in Minnesota: Report of the 2009 Statewide Household Child Care Survey*.
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