

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With nearly 12 million children under age 5 in America today (or about 63 percent of American children) in some kind of child care setting every week, the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) commissioned a national poll in February 2006 of nearly 600 parents with young children on their usage, perceptions, and thoughts on child care.

KEY FINDINGS

Most Important Goal of Child Care

- When parents were asked what their most important goal for child care was, the top two responses were: *“providing a safe and healthy environment”* followed by *“preparing children to enter school ready to learn.”*

Top Attributes Associated with Quality Child Care

- When parents were asked what attributes they most associated with quality child care, the top two responses were: *“caregivers who are loving and nurturing”* followed by *“caregivers who have specialized training in child development.”*

Single Biggest Concern About Child Care

- When parents were asked about their single biggest concern about child care, the top two responses were: *“quality”* (by an overwhelming majority) followed by *“cost.”*

Family Economics

- While many parents would like to stay home to care for their own children, the reality is that most say they can't afford it. Most parents think that making child care more affordable is the most important or one of the most important ways to help working families.

Parents Desire Quality Care

- Nearly 8 in 10 parents said that they would favor a \$10 increase in taxes to improve the quality of child care.
- Parents understand that children begin learning in infancy, and most believe that their child care setting offers a learning environment.

Parents Make Logical Assumptions About Child Care

- Many parents assume that child care providers have training (in first-aid and CPR, in child development, and in recognizing and reporting child abuse); that providers undergo a background check; and, that child care programs are regularly inspected. This is simply not true in too many states.

Parent Choices Among Child Care Options

- Of those parents using child care, nearly two-thirds are using formal child care arrangements (child care centers 30 percent; family child care homes 15 percent; nursery or preschool 17 percent); 23 percent are using relatives to help care for their children; and 11 percent are using friends and neighbors.
- Parents may work alternate shifts to avoid needing to use child care — for families where both parents work, 34 percent work alternate shifts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents want a safe environment for their children. They want their children to be learning. And, they want child care to be affordable. Parents logically assume that some entity is responsible for monitoring and enforcing basic health and safety standards so that their children come home safe and sound at the end of the day. Parents assume that caregivers have training in child development and basic first aid and CPR. Although such assumptions make a lot of sense, they are not the reality in many states.

NACCRRRA calls on states to take the following actions to help ensure that children are both safe and learning while their parents work:

Minimum Pre-Service Training:

- Require all caregivers to have a minimum of 40 hours of training in child development, guidance and discipline, first-aid/CPR, recognizing child abuse, and related health and safety issues *prior* to working with children.

On-going Training:

- Require all caregivers to attend at least 24 hours of training in child development and related subjects on an annual basis (on-going training post-employment).

Training Assessment:

- Require that on-going training be assessed on a regular basis using observational methods to ensure that part of the training relates to a caregiver's ability to interact effectively with children.

Background Checks, Including Fingerprints:

- Require all caregivers to have background checks, including a fingerprint check, *prior* to working with children.

Unannounced Inspections:

- Require all child care programs to undergo random, unannounced inspections on a quarterly basis and set a reasonable maximum caseload per inspector. And, require licensing standards and inspection results to be publicly accessible through the internet.

Developmentally Appropriate Quality Standards:

- Require states to set quality standards that are developmentally appropriate for the age of the child for all types of child care (except for care provided by relatives) to help all children arrive at school ready to learn.

Current State of Child Care Safety & Caregiver Qualifications

10 states require all inspections of child care centers to be unannounced.ⁱ

12 states require caregivers working in child care centers to have training in early childhood education prior to working with children.ⁱⁱ

9 states require caregivers in small family child care homes and 15 states require caregivers in large family child care homes to have training in early childhood education prior to working with children.ⁱⁱⁱ

10 states require all family child care homes to be licensed.^{iv}

See Appendix C for state-by-state information on caregiver training requirements.

ⁱ National Association for Regulatory Administration. 2004 Child Care Center Licensing Study; (www.nara-licensing.org)

ⁱⁱ National Child Care Information Center (<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov>).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.