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Child Care Information and Rating System — Parent Focus Groups Results



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Key Findings and Implications

Key findings

Quality child care

Parents were asked about the factors that influence their choice of a child care provider and what they consider to be a good quality child care program. Parents mentioned the following factors most frequently (**in no specific order**).

- Activities, curriculum, schedule, learning environment
- Caregiver characteristics
- Health/cleanliness
- Program description, personality, philosophy
- Safety.

Most important items to include in a child care information/rating system

Parents were asked to vote on the top two items to include in a child care information/rating system. The categories listed below received the most votes.

Most important to parents:

- Caregiver training and experience
- Safety.

Second most important:

- Licensing rules and violations
- Curriculum and activities.

Third most important:

- Parent feedback
- Interaction with children/caregiver characteristics
- Ratios (caregiver to children)
- Cleanliness.

Information and resources

Parents overwhelmingly agreed that a Web site would be a good place to communicate information about an information/rating system.

Implications

Comments of the parents who participated in the parent focus groups revealed the following implications about both a child care information/rating system overall, and the potential indicators to include in such a system.

Child care information/rating system

The focus groups revealed the following themes about the overall system:

- Parents view the following information about a program as similar and would like to access the information in the same location:
 - Program information:
 - Program logistics, cost, availability, meals
 - Program description, philosophy, personality, structure
 - Licensing
 - Quality rating.
- Some parents expressed concern that a provider with a high rating would not be affordable to them; and that providers with higher ratings would charge more.
- Outreach to low-income parents will be necessary to help them understand how an information/rating system would be a helpful tool. Conversely, some of the more affluent parents seemed eager for an information/rating system.
- Some parents did not seem interested in a rating system:
 - Some parents preferred a program profile (on Web site), similar to the Better Business Bureau, to include length of time in business, policies and references.
 - Other parents who lived in areas with few centers may not need a rating system to select from a small supply; these parents focused on references for family child care providers since the personal relationship with a family child care provider is not easily rated.

Indicators in child care information/rating system

The focus groups revealed the following themes about indicators:

- Parents emphasized the importance of safety and viewed safety and health as distinctly different concepts.
- Licensing information was very important to parents, from three points of view:
 - Being able to easily determine if a provider was licensed
 - Accessible information on licensing standards and regulations
 - Public information on number of violations and complaints.
- Child turnover — how often children left a program was a measure introduced by parents that the joint agency team had not discussed.
- Parents were concerned about the ability of their children to learn in the child care setting, and several groups mentioned curriculum in addition to activities.
- Parents who had experience with a supportive program — one offering comprehensive services, parent supports and referral — appeared to have different expectations for quality child care:
 - Participants in the group that was likely the lowest income group were most distrustful of child care; they focused on health and safety to a great extent, and generally were not involved in “supportive programs” like Head Start.
 - Conversely, another low-income group whose children were involved in supportive programs looked at child care in a more holistic and positive way.
- Cultural differences need to be explored further. (The group conducted in Hmong focused more on caregiver characteristics than any other group).

Introduction

Goal of parent focus groups

The purpose of holding the focus groups was to gather input from parents to inform the development of a child care information/rating system.

Parent input was gathered on the following questions:

- What is quality child care from parents' perspectives?
- What information about child care would be most helpful to have in an information/rating system?
- What information and resources about quality child care would be most helpful to parents?
- How and where would parents like to get access to information about quality child care?

Composition of groups

The child care information/rating system concept is focused on children who are at-risk of not being fully prepared for kindergarten. The focus groups were structured to over-sample parents of at-risk children. In this case, low-income parents served as a proxy for at-risk parents. However, since families of varying income levels seek child care, several parent focus groups were not low-income.

Seven focus groups were conducted the weeks of November 13, 20 and 27, 2006, including:

- Two metro area (low-income)
- Two metro area (not low-income)
- Two greater Minnesota groups (one of which was low-income)
- One Limited English Proficiency (LEP) group (low-income).

The focus groups were held in the following locations, with parents recruited from the partner organizations listed below:

Location	Partner Organization	Metro or out-state
Brainerd	Head Start*	Out-state
Rochester	ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education)	Metro
Hennepin County	Hennepin County WERC* (Minnesota Workforce Center affiliate)	Metro
South St. Paul	Head Start*	Metro

Location	Partner Organization	Metro or out-state
St. Paul**	Hmong American Partnership Diversionary Work Program*	Metro
Fergus Falls	ECFE	Out-state
Anoka	ECFE	Metro

* Indicates that a family must be low-income to qualify for the program.

** Indicates that this group was conducted in Hmong.

Process

The focus groups were sponsored by the Minnesota Governor’s Office in conjunction with the Minnesota Departments of Education (MDE) and Human Services (DHS). Outside moderators were hired to facilitate the groups. Participants were given a \$25 Target gift card for participating and were served a light meal. Child care was provided to all groups except for the workforce program groups, since child care was already available to these parents. The focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes and were comprised of six to 10 participants.

Screening/recruitment

Focus group participants were informally screened by local program contacts. The only screening criterion was that participants were to have used child care in the past two years on a regular basis. Low-income participants were screened based on their participation in a program such as Head Start.

Focus Group Questions

Structure of questions

Questions were designed to elicit responses from parents regarding broader experiences with child care and perceptions of quality to determine families' interests in information that would be useful in a rating system.

Question Number	Purpose
1	Warm-up, gauge parents' experiences with child care
2	Determine type of child care used
3 - 6	What is quality child care from parents' perspectives
7 - 8	What child care information would be most helpful to have in a rating/information system
9 - 10	Resources/information about quality child care

Questions

1. To get our discussion started, let's go around the group for introductions. Please tell us your first name, ages of your children, and if you have used child care on a regular basis recently (in the last two years).
2. Today when we discuss child care, we are talking about child care that you use for the purpose of going to work or school — child care on a regular basis. So let's find out — what type of child care are your children in?
Probe if no response: What type of child care do you use or have you used?
3. Give us examples of things you look for when choosing child care.
Probes: What is most important? What do you like about the type of child care or provider you chose?
4. Tell us the reasons why you would not select a child care provider or program.
Probe: What would make you choose to leave a child care provider or program?
5. Think of a good quality child care program. What words would you use to describe the program?
6. If you were comparing two providers side-by-side and they were the same in terms of cost, convenience and availability, what would make you choose one over the other?
Probes: What is important to you? What are your (top three) priorities?

7. a. What information about child care settings would be most helpful to you to have available in this information system? I'll list them as you name them. *[Moderator: List on easel; then add the others as you confirm they are important.]*
- b. *Listed below are realms, major areas of child care settings. If the parents have not mentioned some of these areas, mention them to trigger their thoughts.*
 What about _____? You have not mentioned _____; would it be helpful to you to have information on _____ in a child care information system?
- Learning
 - Relationship with your child
 - Caregiver training
 - Caregiver experience
 - Communication between family and providers
 - Health and safety.
- c. Now let's go back to these major areas of child care settings that we just talked about in more detail. Let's start with *[participants' first information area listed, or learning]*. What types of information would you want to know about learning in a child care information system? How valuable or helpful do you think this information would be?
8. Top two: we have discussed a lot of different items to include in the child care information system. Which two items would be most important to you to have in an information system that you would use to assist in selecting child care? *[Refer participants to lists from question 7. Ask participants to write down their top two. If time permits and participants are comfortable, ask them to report results to the group.]*
9. Have you ever used any of the following resources to help in selecting a child care provider — Web site, flyer, newsletter, or Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R), other?
Note: Acknowledge networking; many people use recommendations from friends/family.
10. How/where would you like to access information about quality child care? *[Refer back to list in question 9 if participants are not responding.]*

Demographics of Focus Groups

Overall	Seven groups which ranged in size from six to 10 participants	
Total number of parents	57	
Gender*	Male	8
	Female	49
Racial make-up*	Asian	2
	Hmong	10
	Caucasian	29
	Latino	1
	American Indian	2
	African	3
	African American	10
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*	LEP: three parents 10 Hmong parents for group conducted in Hmong	
Age range*	Parents in their 20s and 30s, a few 40+, but no apparent grandparents.	
Type of child care	Parents reported the type of child care they use for the purpose of going to work or school — child care on a regular basis. Some parents reported more than one type.	

Child care center	19
Licensed family child care homes	24
Full-day Head Start	3 8 part-day 1 home-based
Preschool	6
Family, friend or neighbor (FFN)	21
Nanny	3
No child care reported	4

* These demographic characteristics were recorded by observation by the note taker. Parents did not self-report their demographic characteristics.

Focus Group Results

Methodology

The results section of this report includes a summary of focus group participants' comments and represents aggregate data based on the most prevalent themes mentioned by focus group participants. Not all discussion points from every focus group were included in this report. However, a separate document is available that reflects all of the comments from the focus groups sorted by categories.

Good quality child care: analysis of questions 3 - 6

Question 3: Give us examples of things you look for when choosing child care for your child.

Parents' responses were **heavily weighted** in areas of program information:

- Program logistics: cost, availability, meals
- Program description: philosophy, personality, structure.

Other important areas included the following. **These areas were roughly of equal importance to parents:**

- Curriculum, activities, schedule, learning environment
- Caregiver characteristics
- Health, cleanliness
- Caregiver training and experience.

Question 4: Tell us the reasons why you would not select a child care provider or program.

The following responses were mentioned most often by parents with about the same frequency and relative importance. **Therefore, the responses below are not listed in any order of priority.**

- Caregiver characteristics: a sample of responses included not reliable, smoking, style and not effective
- Safety and health: a sample of responses included lack of hygiene and cleanliness, smoking, unsafe neighborhood, poor facilities
- Environment: too much TV, not enough learning
- Personal horror stories of bad experiences with previous provider.

Question 5: Think of a good quality child care program. What words would you use to describe the program?

Caregiver characteristics received the **large majority** of the responses — sample of responses:

Patient	Caring	Honest	Nurturing
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Other characteristics that were frequently mentioned by parents were captured in the three categories below. **The categories are not listed in any order of priority or importance.**

- Program description, philosophy, personality — sample of responses:

Child-centered	Welcoming	Open door policy	Structured
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- Curriculum, activities, schedule, learning environment — sample of responses:

Creativity	Various activities	Lesson plans	Educational
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- Health, cleanliness — sample of responses:

Clean	Sanitary
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Question 6: If you were comparing two providers side-by-side and they were the same in terms of cost, convenience and availability, what would make you choose one over the other?

The following broad categories were mentioned most by parents with about the same frequency and relative importance. **Therefore, the items below are not listed in any order of priority.**

- Caregiver characteristics — sample of responses:

Common sense	Patient	Welcoming	Is she neat and clean?
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- Safety: safe neighborhood, concerns and stories about child maltreatment. Security practices: punch-in-punch-out system good when sex offenders in neighborhood, storage of chemicals in house.

- Intangibles and program — sample of responses:

Warm fuzzy factor	Treat kids like their own	Religious beliefs incorporated
What other kids in program are like (aggressive, gender, ages)		

Focus Group Results

Child care information system: analysis of question 7

Question 7: What information about child care settings would be most helpful to you to have available in a child care information system?

Parents' responses can be categorized into the following classifications.

Primary Importance

The following broad areas were mentioned most often by parents with about the same frequency and relative importance. **Therefore, the areas below are not listed in any order of priority.**

Licensing

- Information about what is required of a licensed provider or program
- Information about complaints, violations and inspections made about individual providers
- Way(s) for parents to find out if a program or provider is licensed.

General program information

- Cost
- Availability, hours
- Meals.

Program description

- Philosophy
- Personality.

Curriculum, activities, schedule, learning environment

Caregiver experience

- Caregiver training
- Caregiver training and experience (together).

Health/cleanliness

Safety

- Preparedness
- Rate of accidents
- Training
- Background checks.

Secondary Importance

The following additional areas were mentioned by parents, but with much less frequency than the areas listed above.

- Facility, location
- Salary, benefits
- Turnover (of children and staff)
- Ratios
- Caregiver characteristics
- Communication with families
- Parent evaluations
- Evaluations from children
- Relationship with child.

Focus Group Results

Top two items to include in an information system: analysis of question 8

Question 8: Top two items to include in an information system

Parents were asked to select the top items to include in an information system.

Top two areas cited:

- Caregiver training and experience
- Safety.

Parents from six different groups mentioned caregiver training and experience, and parents from five groups mentioned safety.

The category of **caregiver training and experience** includes concepts such as:

- Number of years open
- Years, length of experience
- Education background
- Training
- Experience and training.

The category of **safety** includes concepts such as:

- CPR certification
- Safety rating
- Any complaints posted
- Health and safety* — especially cleanliness and adherence to building and health codes.

* There was some overlap between health and safety.

Second tier of votes

The second tier of votes included the following areas:

Licensing, mentioned by four groups:

- Licensing standards
- Inspection results
- Number of incidents — public information.

Curriculum, mentioned by four groups:

- Curriculum
- Learning activities
- Learning opportunities.

Parent feedback, mentioned by three groups:

- Parent evaluations
- Conferences with parents
- Parent satisfaction survey.

Interaction with child, caregiver characteristics, mentioned by three groups:

- Respect, positive attitude, equal opportunities for all children
- Relationship with child
- Interaction style.

Child/caregiver ratios, mentioned by three groups:

- Child to caregiver ratio
- Number of children caregivers are watching (ratios).

Cleanliness, mentioned by three groups:

- Clean, cleanliness
- Clean, comfortable environment

Other areas

Two groups mentioned:

- Philosophy, policies, type of discipline
- Nutrition (good food)
- Communication between family and provider.

One group mentioned:

- Financial information
- Turnover of children
- Child's perception of caregiver and setting
- Referrals — willing to make referrals, know where to refer families with special needs children
- Provide a profile of the business (similar to Better Business Bureau).

Focus Group Results

Resources previously used to find child care

Question 9: Have you ever used any of the following resources to help in selecting a child care provider – Web site, flyer, newsletter, or Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R), other?

Used more frequently

(These resources are listed in no particular order of importance.)

CCR&R

- Participants in six of the seven groups were familiar with a local CCR&R organization
- At least some parents in the groups had used a CCR&R.

Word of mouth

- Parents from five groups said they had used word of mouth from friends, landlord, relatives, job counselor, or family service worker (Early Head Start), and others
- Parents indicated that Parade of Child Care Providers, a one-day event for families to visit several sites, organized by a child care association, was very helpful in comparing programs.

Internet

- Participants in four groups had used the internet or Web sites to find child care
- One group said they had not used this resource.

Used less frequently

(These resources are listed in no particular order of importance.)

Flyers

- Participants from two groups had used flyers
- Three groups said they generally do not use flyers.

Newsletter/newspaper

- Of the four groups that responded to this question, all said that they did not use this information source.

Focus Group Results

How/where to access information about quality child care

Question 10: How/where would you like to access information about quality child care?

The **top response** mentioned by six of seven groups was internet/Web site.

Other responses (listed in no particular order of importance):

- Library*
- County offices*
- Booklet that lists providers and how they differ from each other
- 800 number
- Workforce centers
- Community centers
- Home visits
- Hospital, in the maternity ward
- CCR&R
- Newsletter in mail.

* Both were mentioned as places where those who don't have computers could go.

Update frequently

Several participants mentioned that a booklet or Web site would need to be updated often to keep it current.

Focus Group Participant Characteristics and Themes by Group

The table outlines the characteristics of the focus group participants by group and presents a summary of each group’s responses to questions about child care selection and quality, as well as what is important to them in an information system. The information in the table illustrates that responses differed significantly by income and geographic location.

Location/ Type of Site	Participant Characteristics	Child Care Selection and Quality	Information System - “Top Two” Most Important
Brainerd/ Head Start and Child Care Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young working parents (4 of 6 were single parents) • Lower income • Seemed to be making good use of supportive systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group was not very comfortable with family child care providers as contrasted with the comprehensive nature of Head Start. They had experience with referrals to special needs programs, nurse assisting children with medical concerns, and home visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Staff education, training • Referrals to special needs programs • Values, beliefs (including religion of the provider).
Rochester/ ECFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeared affluent • Several were stay-at-home parents • Many using part-time care and nannies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group was very comprehensive in listing what they looked for in selecting care; they covered almost every possible angle with little consensus • Each parent seemed to have their own well-thought-out list of criteria. 	<p>Listed in order of most votes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver training and experience • Child turnover • Safety • Interaction with child • Parent evaluations.
Hennepin County/ WERC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On public assistance: currently in work program as part of MFIP • Lower income • Seemed to have fewer options for child care • No one was using a comprehensive program like Head Start. 	<p>Lack of trust was a prevalent theme of this group; parents were not trusting of leaving their children with someone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hennepin County wants you to go off working, but you can’t trust people to care for your children” • “It is hard, you work but you can’t find quality child care.” <p>The group was very focused on cleanliness, health and safety — not only in the facility but also in the neighborhood where the provider was located.</p>	<p>The factors which received the most votes for “top two” were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provider years of experience, years open, and number of children cared for • Cleanliness.
South St. Paul/ Head Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low to middle income, primarily working parents, a few single parents • All the parents had at least one child who attended the morning Head Start program and afternoon child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested in having children interact with kids of same age and having age-appropriate curriculum • Caregiver characteristics important — primary reason why parent would not select a provider • Parents were intrigued by the potential of an information system, but one person did express 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Safety • Communication (daily progress reports).

Location/ Type of Site	Participant Characteristics	Child Care Selection and Quality	Information System - "Top Two" Most Important
	care at the facility where the focus group was held.	(after the focus group was over) that it could price low-income families out of high quality child care, as those with high ratings would charge more, so only well-off families would be able to afford them.	
Hmong American Partnership English Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the U.S. for less than 2 1/2 years • None were employed, all on MFIP work plan • All but one have used child care on a regular basis during the last two years, mostly licensed family child care homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group focused more on caregiver characteristics than any other group: traits such as speaking kindly, having a good heart, etc., were mentioned. • Factors influencing child care selection: the home environment, the personality/attitude of the provider and the provider's experience. 	<p>Top two items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caregiver personality (patient, sincere) • Learning activities for children.
Fergus Falls/ ECFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All but one used a licensed family child care home • In Fergus Falls, about the only care available is in-home. Supply is less than demand. Students at the community college are dropping out because unable to find part-time or evening care. Cost of centers is too high for parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In choosing a provider, parents mentioned a wide range of reasons. • From moderator: "I left feeling unconvinced that they wanted a 'rating system,' but that they would prefer information that would help them make a choice between child care settings on a more personal level. Perhaps part of the reason was that there are few choices besides licensed and unlicensed home care settings. Ratings might seem more appropriate for larger facilities, where the personal relationship with one provider could be less important." 	<p>Top three choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents' references: more interested in testimonials than in information that might lend itself to a rating system • The "contract" itself, with details such as child care policies, whether part-time or drop-in, etc. • Provider education, training.
Anoka/ ECFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle-income group • Four stay-at-home moms, several at home by choice but cost of child care a factor • Several had not used child care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern expressed by some that an information system would drive up costs because programs with higher ratings could charge more • This group really wanted more information about the provider that they felt could not be rated. They liked the idea of the Better Business Bureau's profile on businesses that provides facts about the business and its background. 	<p>Group consensus around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program profile (on Web site) to include, for example, policies, references, number of employees, length of time in business • Parent satisfaction survey • Safe environment.

Related Studies and Surveys

Parents selecting quality child care: results from local and national reports

Ceglowski, D. (2004). How Stakeholders Define Quality in Child Care, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32 (2) pp 101-111

Data was collected in 38 focus groups held in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout Minnesota during 2000. Participants included a full representation of Minnesota residents, with translators provided for participants who spoke a language other than English. Parent responses during the focus groups were categorized and frequencies of responses in each category were reported.

Characteristics of quality child care providers

Parents most frequently mentioned communicating well with families (41 percent) as a characteristic of quality child care providers. Parents also indicated that a caring, stable provider who provides individual attention (24 percent) is important to them. Professionalism and training were viewed by parents as equally important (24 percent) as a caring environment to a quality child care experience.

Characteristics of quality child care programs

A learning and structured environment that provides culturally responsive care (45 percent) is a characteristic of quality child care programs. Parents also indicated that it is important that programs welcome and support parents (24 percent). Parents mentioned safety and adequate facilities in 18 percent of their responses.

Ceglowski, D. (2006). *Child Care Through the Eyes of Parents, Children and Child Care Providers: Parent Satisfaction and Views on Child Care Choices, Minnesota Child Care Policy and Research Partnership, Briefing Paper.*

Available at <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrserver/Legacy/DHS-4726-ENG>

The information from parents was collected in a series of quarterly interviews over a two-year period. Low-income and middle-income parents were recruited with approximately three-quarters of the families eligible for the Minnesota Family Investment Program or Basic Sliding Fee child care assistance at some point during the two-year study.

Characteristics of quality child care providers

Parents' top three priorities were comfort, caring and communication. Comfort was described by parents as a qualitative feeling in the child care environment, which was in large part created through relationships between the caregiver and the children. Caring included a sense of a caregiver's genuine interest in and affection for children. Communication was the sharing of information, both

formally and informally, in order to encourage a smooth daily transition and strong link between the child care setting and the home.

Parents' child care choices are also shaped by practical issues that they conceptualized as part of child care quality. These practical factors included clear expectations for parent, child and provider; clear policies such as hours of availability and vacation days; responsiveness to parents' requests and schedules, including cultural appropriateness and providing assistance for children with disabilities or at risk for developmental delays; availability during non-standard hours and school vacations; location; and cost.

Reasons for rejecting providers

Parents' reasons for rejecting providers included too many children and lack of individual attention; ineffective or inappropriate discipline practices; poor communication with parents concerning behavior or illness; lack of flexibility regarding scheduling, payments or children's needs; and conditions that seemed unsafe, such as high traffic or a policy allowing unleashed pets.

Minnesota Department of Human Services (2005). *Child Care Use in Minnesota: 2004 Statewide Household Child Care Survey.*

Available at <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-4623-ENG>

Information was collected from parents in a telephone survey of 1,362 households. The study results included only households who reported regularly using child care.

According to the study authors, the sample was reasonably representative of Minnesota families with children under age 12.

Reasons for selecting current child care arrangement

Convenience, quality and cost were the top reasons for choosing specific child care arrangements. For children who were in family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care, parents cited a preference for care by a family member, trust, and a place where child could be cared for when sick. Parents whose children were enrolled in center-based care and supervised activities (after-school programs) cited the importance of structure and activities. Parents of children younger than 5 years old were more likely to report choosing their child care arrangement based on program quality rather than location.

Rating importance of child care characteristics

Parents rated a list of characteristics of child care programs and providers as very, somewhat, or not important in choosing child care. Special training of the caregiver was the top "very important" reason overall (73 percent); this was followed by reasonable cost (67 percent), a place close to home (66 percent), and small group size (61 percent).

What would parents change about their current child care arrangement?

In response to an open-ended question, 31 percent of respondents said they would change nothing about their child care arrangement, while 14 percent said they would add more structure and activities. Responses provided by fewer than 10 percent of parents included (**in order of frequency cited**): increased availability, lower cost, caregivers themselves, reduced staff turnover, location, size of the program, staff-child ratios, physical features and quality of the facilities, other children, food, amount of and type of discipline, and the training and capability of the caregivers.

Parents' views about a potential child care quality rating system

Results indicated that 88 percent of parents thought the system would be very or somewhat helpful. Specifically, 54 percent of parents thought such a system would be very helpful, 34 percent somewhat helpful, 3.3 percent not very helpful, and 5.4 percent not helpful at all.

Parents who were more likely to say a quality rating system would be helpful included those whose primary language at home was not English, those with low incomes, and those reporting about the child care arrangements of a child age 5 and younger.

When marketing a child care reporting system

Among households with low incomes, those who received child care subsidies were more likely than those without subsidies to be aware of the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency; those who learned about their current primary arrangement through community or CCR&R services; and those who choose child care based on quality of care rather than cost.

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), (2006). *What Do Parents Think about Child Care? Findings from a Series of Focus Groups.*

Available at http://www.naccrra.org/randd/data/Focus_Grp_Report_PROOF.pdf

Fourteen focus groups were conducted in seven locations across the country. The groups were selected for ethnic and economic representation. Low-income parents, single parents, and fathers' groups were purposefully selected. The majority of the parents were employed full-time.

Parents' priorities in selecting child care

Parents' first priorities were cost, cleanliness and location. "Clean and friendly" was a common refrain heard in the focus groups.

Also important to parents was a caregiver who was friendly and caring, attuned to the needs and capabilities of their children, and informative and professional toward them. Most important, parents wanted to ensure their children were happy with the caregiver.

Parents wanted their children to learn through activities, play and structured curricula. They did not want children to be pushed too early, but they also did not want them to be simply “babysat.” Both English-speaking and non-English speaking parents were interested in placing their children in settings where they could learn new languages.

Smaller class sizes and staff-to-child ratios were also important factors for parents. They wanted their children to be in a setting where they were provided with individualized attention.

Parents also mentioned wanting caregivers to have specific training in child development, CPR and first aid. A smaller number of parents mentioned wanting caregivers to have either a two- or four-year degree. Some parents said that a caregiver’s experience was more important to them than training.

Comparison of Findings to Local and National Studies and Surveys

The findings of these parent focus groups, conducted by the Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services (MDE/DHS), were consistent with recent studies and reports (summarized in the previous section of this report) that measured parents’ concepts of quality child care, and the relative importance that parents place on various child care characteristics in selecting care.

The results of the MDE/DHS focus groups differed slightly from the reports summarized in the previous section of this document in that MDE/DHS focus group participants:

- Gave more importance to cleanliness and health practices
- Gave more importance to caregiver experience
- Gave less importance to communication with families
- More frequently mentioned safety as a factor in selecting child care
- Less frequently mentioned cost as a characteristic of quality child care. However, consistent with other reports summarized in this document, parents did indicate that cost was a factor in selecting their current child care arrangement.

This information is available in other forms to people with disabilities by contacting us at (651) 431-4671 (voice). TTY/TDD users can call the Minnesota Relay at 711 or (800) 627-3529. For the Speech-to-Speech Relay, call (877) 627-3848.



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