

Report on Community Survey Results

Summary

The Anchorage Child Care & Early Education (ACCEE) Fund Implementation Team conducted a community survey between January 23-March 11, 2024, which yielded 425 responses. The survey contained 33 questions designed to collect information regarding community needs in the child care and early education sector, and how best the ACCEE Fund can address those needs. The survey was shared widely by the Anchorage Assembly, Alaska Children’s Trust and a variety of partner organizations, advertised at in-person and virtual community conversations held by ACCEE, and advertised on social media and radio.

Respondents identified a number of child care and early education challenges our community is facing:

- lack of available/accessible care options
- lack of affordable care, lack of consistent care
- high staff turnover at care facilities
- lack of funding at care facilities
- low staff wages
- poor staff benefits
- burdensome municipal licensing processes
- overdue improvements to facilities

Respondents also identified a number of steps that the ACCEE Fund could take to address the city’s child care and early education challenges, including:

- increasing wages/benefits for staff at child care facilities
- reducing tuition
- making more families eligible for tuition assistance
- supporting staff training and professional development

- supporting providers and staff as they navigate the municipal licensing process
- increasing the number of facilities providing child care and/or early education services
- improving existing facilities

Respondents identified themselves as child care providers and early educators, board members at early childcare facilities, parents/childcare users, grandparents, and other kin. Parents/caregivers, providers, and business owners each answered different specific questions, and every respondent answered the introductory, demographic, and final questions. The majority of responses came from individuals between the ages of 35-44. Most parents/caregivers either had no children, one child, or two children under the age of 8. 78% of the response came from individuals who identified as white, while 84% of respondents were female.

Survey Results

Introductory Questions

Who participated in the survey:

- 51% parent/caregiver of a child or children under 8 years of age
- 14% parent/caregiver of a child or children 8 years or older
- 17% child care provider/early education professional
- 6% business owner
- 12% other

Parent Questions

Seventy percent of parent respondents reported seeking and/or utilizing child care services for one or more of their children within the past three years. 52% of those who answered “no” to the question had sought and/or utilized care previously. Most respondents said that the cost of care was unreasonable, and that cheaper care would make them more likely to use it. In a significant proportion of families, parents/caregivers were forced to stay at home and reduce their working hours to care for children, disproportionately affecting women. Respondents identified ways the ACCEE Fund could make finding or retaining child care and/or early education services easier, including reducing tuition, providing staff training, supporting staff to incentivize retention, and increasing staff wages.

Question: Identify the most difficult aspects to finding care.

Ranked in order from most to least popular.

1. Finding affordable care; finding quality care (tie)
2. Finding a provider that you felt safe leaving your child(ren) with
3. Finding care that is available the hours you work
4. Finding care close to you
5. Finding any care at all; finding consistent care (tie)

Comments from respondents who marked “other” identified the following additional concerns:

- Lack of special needs care
- Limited care opportunities in Girdwood/Eagle River
- Staffing issues at care facilities
- Reliability of care
- Limited space at care facilities
- Finding non-religious care
- Lack of flexible schedule at care facilities
- Lack of infant/afterschool care

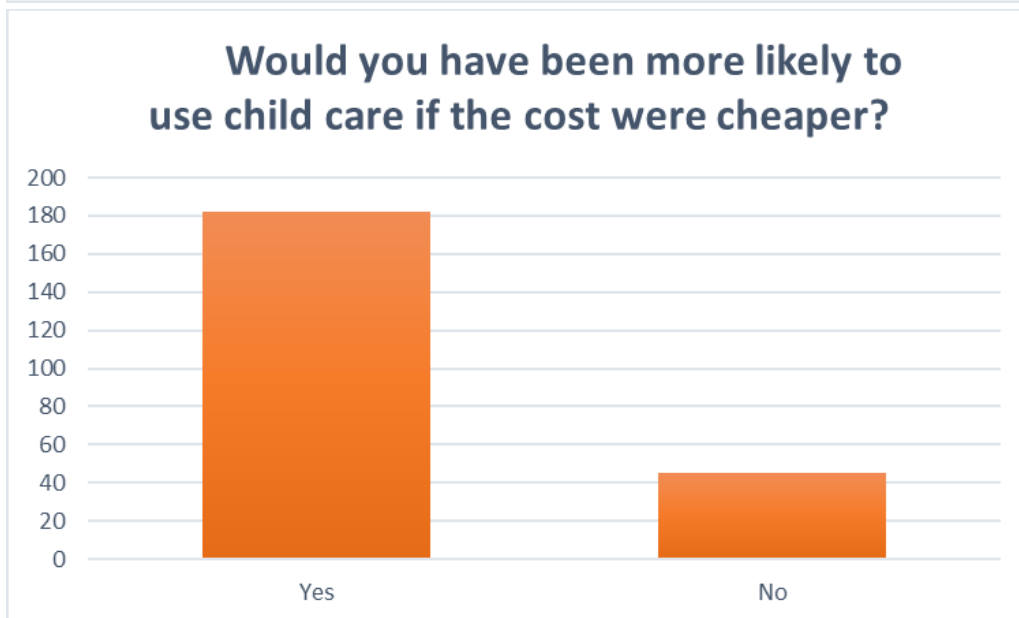
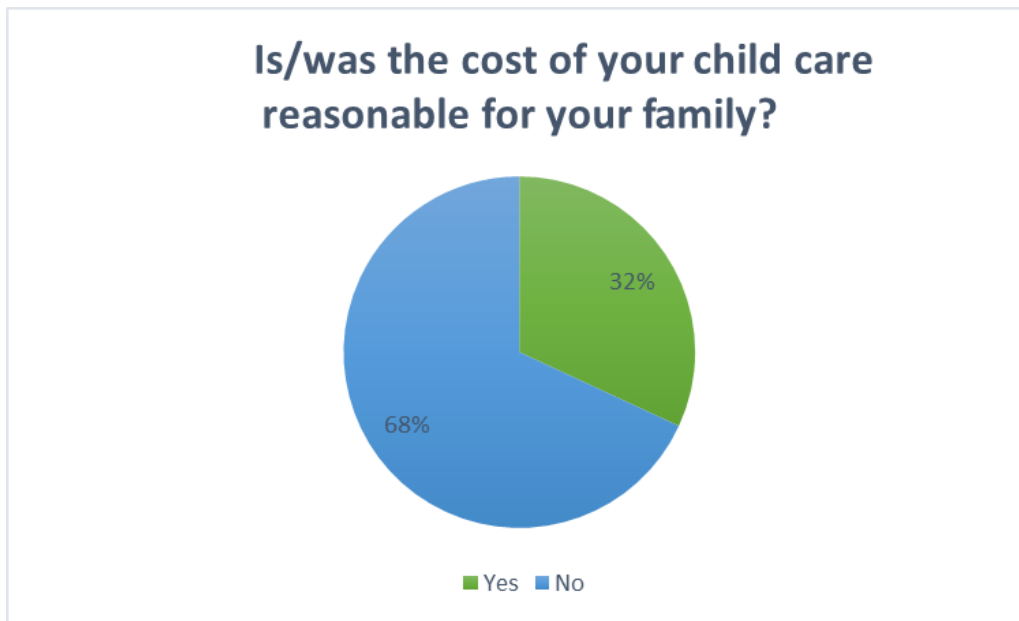
Question: Did any adult family members have to make the choice to stay home instead of working based on the cost of care or lack of available care?

- 47% of respondents indicated that at least one family member/caregiver was forced to stay home.
- Parents/caregivers left their jobs, reduced hours, or switched to remote work schedules based on the need to provide care at home.
- This burden fell primarily on female caregivers.

Question: What can the ACCEE Fund do to make finding or retaining child care services easier for families?

- Ensure that there are quality programs in the Municipality with well-trained staff.
- Support staff to incentivize retention.
- Reduce tuition.
- Offer training for staff.
- Increase staff wages, which will increase the number of people working in the sector; with understaffed facilities, many childcare centers are over capacity and there are not enough spaces for children.

- Concern that there is a geographically equitable distribution of funds across the Municipality (i.e. outlying communities within the Municipality like Girdwood and Eagle River should also see some funds).



Provider Questions

A vast majority of providers who responded to the survey have been in the field for over a decade, and 100% indicated that they enjoy providing child care/early education services. However, most respondents said that their wages were not enough to live on comfortably and pay their bills, while 38% of respondents said that they would not remain in the field. To make the field more sustainable, respondents identified a need for better pay and benefits, improved work environment and support from employers, as well as better regulatory practices. Respondents identified several ways that the ACCEE Fund could be used to support providers/child care workers including supporting higher and

equal pay for all staff, staff benefits, staff resources and training, facilities improvement, and assistance meeting licensing guidelines.

Question: Is your hourly wage sufficient to pay the bills?

- 61% of respondents answered “no.”
- Those answering "no" for the most part earned less than \$20/hr. and indicated that they would need to work between 50-100 hrs./week on their current salary to pay bills and make ends meet.
- Those answering "yes" for the most part indicated earning more than \$30/hr. and/or were in the upper administration of their care center.

Question: Select which challenges you face at your current child care job.

Ranked in order from most to least popular

1. Insufficient pay
2. Lack of health care or other benefits
3. Lack of training or professional development; lack of appreciation (tie)
4. Working too many hours

Comments highlighted additional challenges faced by care providers:

- Unequal pay structure
- Inconsistent/inconsiderate management
- Overall lack of funding
- Staff risk exposure to illnesses such as COVID-19

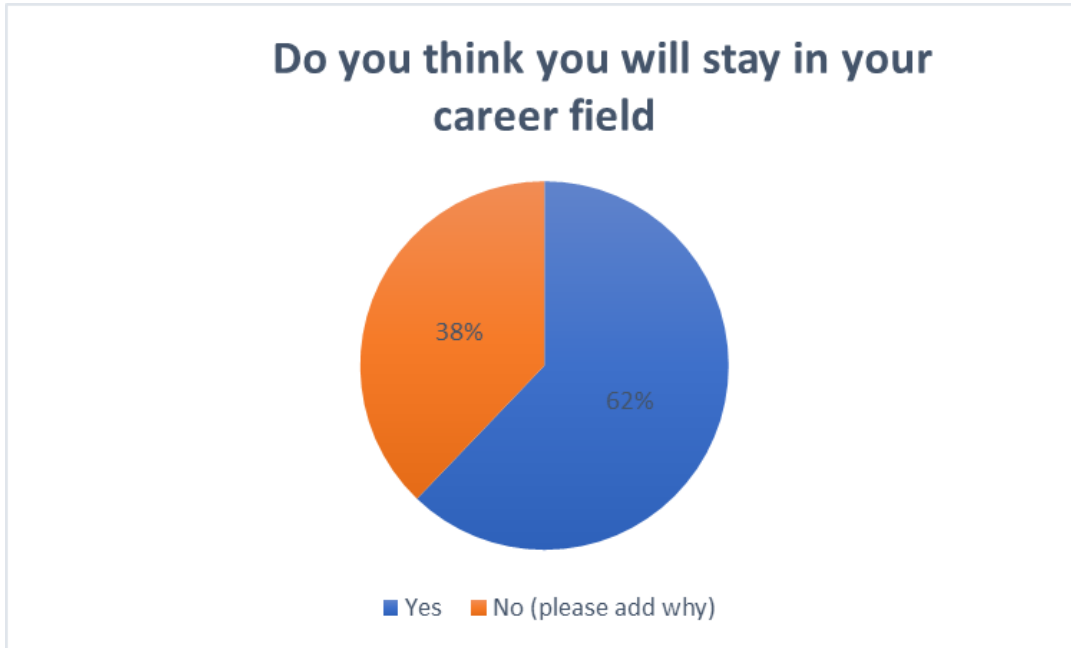
Question: From your perspective, what would make the child care and early education sector more sustainable?

- Better pay and benefits for educators/staff
- More workable regulatory practices aimed at supporting child care facilities
- Better work environment to support retention
- More focus given to needs of workers

Question: What could the ACCEE Fund do to better support you in your work caring for children?

- Higher and equal pay for all staff
- Flexibility for staff
- More support all around
- Health care for staff
- Better benefits packages

- Better training and resources to support staff
- Improved facilities
- Increased number of facilities
- Assistance with regulatory compliance



Those who said that they would not remain in the field cited the following reasons:

- Insufficient wages for staff to support themselves long term or support a family
- Lack of benefits
- Unacceptable working conditions
- Lack of support for pregnant workers

Business Questions

Due to the low number of responses from business owners (9), the data in this section are not representative of the sector as a whole. 100% of respondents said that employees’ access to child care services impacted their overall business. 50% of the respondents currently offer some kind of child care or child care incentive to employees, and 67% said they would be interested in setting up employer-provided or supported child care if funds were available to start this kind of program and quality staff were available. Respondents identified many ways that access to child care and early education services currently impacts business in Anchorage, including reducing the workforce as parents stay home, causing families with young children to leave the state in search of better care, and making it difficult for the city to attract families with young children, all of which negatively impact local and state economies. Respondents also described how the ACCEE Fund could be used to address the child care crisis, identifying key areas which include increased staff support, support for

providers' operational costs, stipends to support low-income families' tuition, access to provider training, facility improvements, and ease of navigating the municipal licensing process.

Question: Is there any impact on your business based on employees' ability to secure stable, reliable child care?

- Many workers can't come in on particular days when they cannot find childcare, particularly impacting small businesses.
- Unreliable child care access means people can't return from maternity/paternity leave and/or work a full schedule when they do.
- Businesses where people cannot work remotely are most affected.

Question : What do you believe the impacts of insufficient child care services are on Anchorage's workforce and economy?

- Decline in number of parents who want to work outside their home leading to isolation and stress.
- Young families, those with kids, and/or those looking to have kids moving away from Anchorage/Alaska.
- This reduction to the workforce has a negative impact on the economy.
- Lack of child care makes it difficult to attract young working families to Anchorage, making positions difficult to fill.

Question: How do you think the ACCEE Fund could be used to support businesses impacted by child care challenges?

- More staff support
- Staff childcare costs support
- Support in operations costs
- Stipends for low-income families for tuition
- Stipends for providers to support low-income families and/or reduce overall tuition
- More access to provider training
- Waiving municipal licensing fees
- Facility improvements/updates

Final Questions (answered by everyone)

Respondents were for the most part already aware of the difficulties faced by child care/early education workers and providers; 71% said they knew that the average child care worker in Alaska

earns approximately \$14/hr. Respondents identified actions that the ACCEE Fund could take to address the child care crisis in Anchorage, including subsidizing costs for providers and parents and increasing benefits and wages for workers. Given the opportunity to rank how best the ACCEE Fund should be spent, respondents supported 1) increasing childcare workers' wages followed by 2) improving workers' benefits and 3) making more families eligible for tuition assistance.

Question: How do you think the ACCEE Fund could be used to address the child care crisis in Anchorage?

- Subsidize care providers
- Subsidize parents seeking care for their children
- Make licensing easier
- Support willing caregivers in their licensing
- Increase wages for educators
- Improve benefits and work environment overall

Question: Please indicate how the ACCEE Fund should be used.

Respondents ranked available choices in this order:

1. Pay child care providers more so they can make a competitive wage.
2. Provide health care and other benefits to child care workers.
3. Increase the income limit to make more families eligible for child care assistance.
4. Increase the monthly amount of child care assistance a family receives.
5. Allow families to utilize child care assistance payments to offset personal income so a parent/caregiver can remain at home instead of work outside the home.
6. Fund new child care facilities or major upgrades to facilities so more care is available.
7. Fund training or new professional opportunities to ensure providers are adequately trained to provide high-quality care.
8. Provide technical assistance or other support to new child care businesses so more care is available.
9. Support establishing more available care for nontraditional hours, such as evenings and weekends.
10. Support mobile child care or other part-time, pop-in care.

Question: Is there anything else you would like to share with the ACCEE Fund implementation team?

Two interrelated issues, lack of capacity at facilities and insufficient wages for educators, were by far the most popular answers here. One quote summarizes the spirit of most answers:

"Childcare facilities currently open cannot find staff and are not able to run at full capacity because of low wages. Unless that changes, none of the other things will matter. Providers can't care for children without a sufficient number of reliable staff."