

# 2 CHILD CARE CONSUMERS



Working families face a variety of challenges raising their children and depend on reliable, affordable, quality child care services to maintain their economic security. As the Sacramento region makes its way toward economic recovery, it is critical that our system of child care services remain responsive to the needs of Sacramento families as they seek permanent employment and financial stability.

## 2.1 THE 2011 PARENT SURVEY

In the fall 2011 the Sacramento County Child Care and Development Planning Council conducted a survey of 226 Sacramento parents with children in child care services to better assess the child care needs of families. The same survey was first conducted in Sacramento in 2006 and is based on a national survey conducted by the National Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (NACCRRA) in 2006 and 2008.<sup>1</sup> While the Sacramento survey did not ensure a random sample from parents throughout the county, there were similar patterns of responses to the NACCRRA survey, which was based on a more representative stratified sample.

Respondents to the Sacramento County survey primarily included families with two children using full-time child care due to parent employment.

Comparison of the survey results shows remarkable consistency in the values and priorities of parents, regardless of the economic climate.

■ While financial realities have changed significantly in the last few years, parents' top priorities for the care of their children remain unchanged. Parents continue to seek quality child care services, which they describe as safe, healthy, and nurturing, for their children.

■ Similar to the 2006 survey results, parents expressed concern about the lack of child care available and limited choices of quality child care services. This concern is consistent with local data on

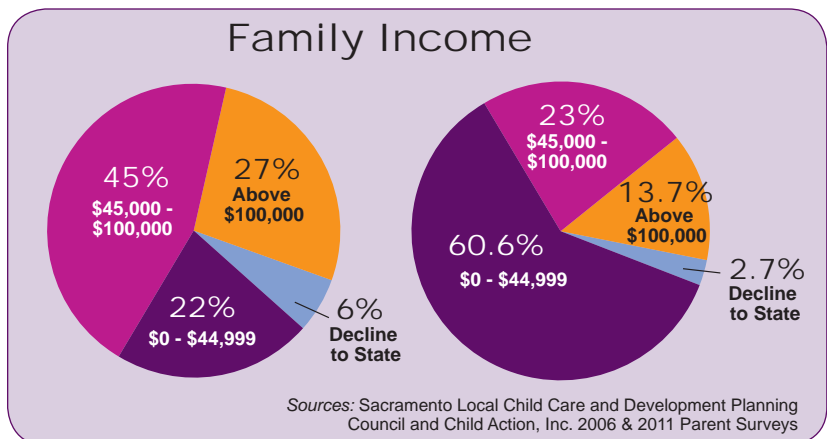
child care supply, which describes a 4 percent reduction in licensed child care homes and centers serving infants and school-age children in full day settings.

■ The survey also indicates that parents may have misconceptions about the regulation, monitoring and educational standards of child care services. Parents also used the survey as an opportunity to respond with recommendations about improving child care services to better meet their needs.

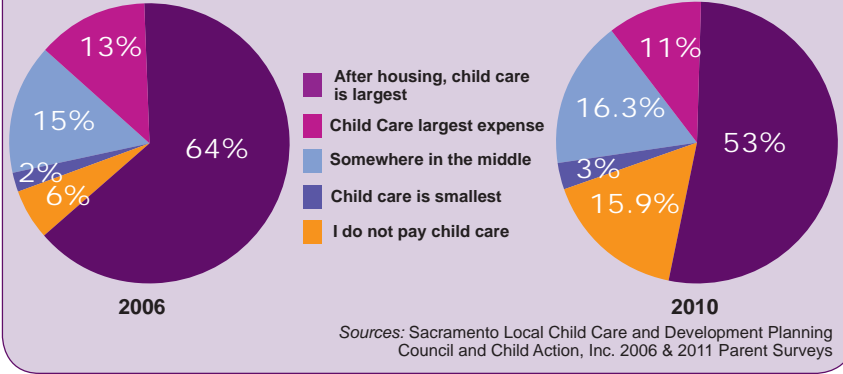
### 2.1.1 PARENT SURVEY DATA

Parents reported having 363 children between the ages of birth and twelve who needed child care services. Of the parents surveyed, 32 percent utilized part-time care, and 68 percent utilized full-time care for their children. This remains consistent with the 2006 report where parents used part-time and full-time care at about the same rates.

One third of the respondents were child care consumers with a child under the age of two years. Thirty-seven percent have children of preschool age, 3 to 5 years. Thirty percent had a child five years or



## Child Care Expenses



In the 2011 survey, 11 percent identified child care as the largest expense in their monthly budget compared to 13 percent of the parents in 2006.

Parents are using a variety of child care options to meet their family needs. Thirty-four percent of families are using licensed child care centers and thirty-seven percent are using licensed family child care homes for a total of seventy-one percent of families using licensed care. Twenty-

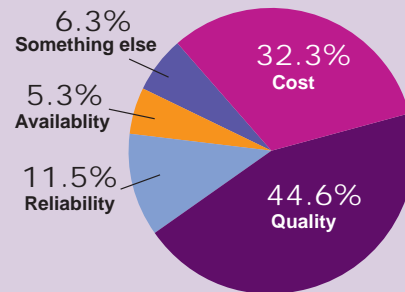
three percent are using family, friends or neighbors. Five percent are using part-time preschool programs.

older. Seventy-one percent were using licensed child care services in a child care center or family child care home. (See graph previous page.)

Parents who participated in the 2011 survey represented a wide range of socio-economic groups, with sixty-one percent reporting incomes of \$0 to \$44,999. This is a significant change from the population survey in 2006, where only twenty-two percent of the parents reported incomes in this range and forty-five percent reported incomes in the \$45,000 to \$100,000 range. Thirty-nine percent of parents reported they were receiving a child care subsidy. (See graph below.)

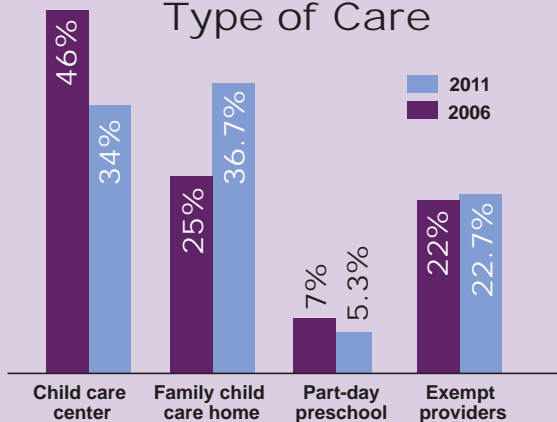
In 2011, the majority of parents (53%) identified child care as the largest expense in their budget after housing costs compared to the 2006 survey when 64 percent of parents reported child care as the largest expense in the budget after their housing payment.

## Child Care Concerns



Sources: Sacramento Local Child Care and Development Planning Council and Child Action, Inc. 2011 Parent Survey

## Type of Care



Sources: Sacramento Local Child Care and Development Planning Council and Child Action, Inc. 2006 & 2011 Parent Surveys

## Decision Factors in Finding Child Care

**Ranked in Order of Importance were the same in both 2006 and 2011 Parent Surveys**

1. A Safe Environment
2. A Loving, Nurturing Environment
3. A Clean Environment
4. A Provider With A Good Attitude
5. A Learning Environment
6. Child Care Providers Trained In Child Development
7. Child Care That Is Reasonably Priced
8. A Convenient Location

Sources: Sacramento Local Child Care and Development Planning Council and Child Action, Inc. 2006 & 2011 Parent Surveys

Parents overwhelmingly identified quality as their top concern for child care. This ranking remains consistent with reports from the 2006 survey even though the financial stresses on families are greater in 2011 than in 2006, and the parent population represents a significantly greater proportion of low-income families.

Parents were asked to rank in order of importance the factors that played the biggest role in their decision to select a child care provider. Just as they responded in the 2006 survey, parents consistently rated their highest priorities as safety, security, cleanliness and engaging caregivers. (See graph previous page.)

Parents were asked to identify what attribute they most associated with high-quality care from a list of attributes often associated with quality of care by professionals in the field. Nurturing caregivers, trained in child development, providing care in a safe, clean environment summarized the parents' definition of quality child care. While nurturing remains the top attribute of quality in all surveys, licensing has increased in importance by 4 percent since 2006.

### Questions Regarding Child Care Laws and Practices in California

Parent Survey Responses

<i>The correct answer for all of the questions below is "false."</i>	"True"	"False"	"I Don't Know"
All providers have to go through training in child development before they work with children.	40%	33%	27%
The government inspects all licensed child care programs on an annual basis.	56%	20%	24%
All child care programs are required to be licensed.	63%	26%	11%
All child care providers provide learning opportunities to children.	26%	53%	21%
All providers are trained to recognize and report the signs of child abuse.	51%	23%	26%
All providers are trained in child guidance and discipline.	27%	41%	32%

Source: Sacramento Local Child Care and Development Planning Council and Child Action, Inc. 2011 Parent Survey

The parent survey included a series of questions assessing parents' understanding of the standards and regulations for California's child care services. Many of the assumptions parents make about the requirements and monitoring of licensed child care programs do not reflect the existing regulations and quality standards for California's child care services. Fifty-six percent of parents believe that child care is inspected annually, when, in fact, California child care services are required to be visited every five years. In all but one question, a quarter to a third of the parents responded that they did not know about the training, licensing, and educational requirements of the people who cared for their children.

These responses underscore the need for consumer education on the laws and practices relating to early care and education in California and Sacramento County.

The survey provided a list of policy proposals that have been previously considered to improve the quality of child care in the community. For each item,

### Attributes Most Associated with High Quality Child Care

	Year		
	Sacramento 2006	2011	National 2006
Caregivers are loving and nurturing	21%	27%	28%
Caregivers are trained in child development	19%	18%	19%
Child care is in a safe and clean environment	19%	18%	16%
Caregivers have good attitude about children	8%	10%	7%
Caregivers are licensed to provide child care	12%	8%	12%
Children are learning new things	5%	5%	4%
Caregivers have a formal education (AA or BA)	6%	5%	4%
Child care accredited by national organization	3%	5%	2%
Child care has quality rating from state government	3%	3%	4%
Regular health and safety inspections	3%	1%	4%

Sources: Sacramento Local Child Care and Development Planning Council and Child Action, Inc. 2006 & 2011 Parent Surveys

parents were asked to indicate whether or not they strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with that proposal.

Most notably, more than 80 percent of respondents strongly agree that provider training programs include classes in child development, first aid and CPR, child guidance and discipline; that annual inspections of child care programs be required; and that policies should be in place to require all types of child care to meet basic standards of quality, including family home-based providers. Respondents would also like to see public funding made available so working families can afford child care (80%). A majority of parents strongly agreed with recommendations for more training before providers work with children (74%). These responses align with 2006 survey comments with one exception. Two-thirds of the parents strongly agreed that there should be quality standards for all types of child care to help all children start school ready to learn, representing a 7 percent increase since 2006.

In summary, parents in Sacramento County are concerned with the quality and regulation of the child care services their children receive. The following themes emerged in the parents' responses:

- Quality child care should be provided by skilled, nurturing adults trained in child development.
- Quality child care environments should meet basic health and safety standards.
- Annual inspections and consistent monitoring are important.
- Public funding that makes service accessible for working families is needed.

## 2.2 WORKPLACE POLICIES

In the spring of 2011, the unemployment rate in Sacramento County reached 12.9 percent<sup>2</sup>. Despite the economic downturn in Sacramento County, 63 percent of children in our region birth through five are in child care some portion of their week. While family supports such as employer-supported child care, extended family leave, and flexible work hours remain important to working families, employers do not see these supports as vital to their bottom line in these times.

■ Employer-supported child care is not available to most working families in Sacramento. The costs of developing programs and the expertise that is needed to launch such efforts often leave programs in the

### Parent Survey Responses

Previous Policy Proposals	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Require all types of child care to meet basic standards of quality, including centers and family home based providers.	83%	12%	2%	2%	1%
Set quality standards for all types of child care, including centers and family home based providers, to help all children arrive at school ready to learn.	66%	24%	6%	3%	2%
Provide public funding to make child care more affordable for working families.	80%	13%	2%	3%	2%
Provide public funding to ensure all child care providers have adequate training.	68%	20%	6%	4%	2%
Improve existing health and safety standards for child care.	70%	20%	6%	1%	2%
Require training for child care providers before they can work with children.	74%	19%	4%	1%	4%
Require annual inspection of child care programs.	84%	12%	2%	1%	1%
Require providers to participate in on-going training programs.	70%	21%	6%	1%	2%
Require that provider training programs include classes in child development, first aid and CPR, child guidance and discipline, and recognition of the signs of abuse.	85%	12%	1%	1%	1%

Sources: Sacramento Local Child Care and Development Planning Council and Child Action, Inc. 2011 Parent Survey

development phase.

■ While California has been on the forefront of paid family leave, less than 25 percent of parents eligible to utilize Paid Family Leave do so. Unlike time off from work through the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave per year, Paid Family Leave does not provide job protection. This could be a significant deterrent to parents in the current employment market.

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### 2.3 EMERGING ISSUES AND POLICY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

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■ Sacramento families are struggling with the rising cost of living and continued effects of the economic downturn. The cost of child care continues to be a large portion of family budgets. Financial assistance for child care services for low-income working families remains critical to secure and maintain employment.

■ Parents strongly support requirements that ensure all child types of child care meet basic standards of quality. Maintenance of a strong child care licensing system, with annual facility inspections, and requirements for background checks for all types of child care providers is critical to insure children are safe.

■ Parents strongly support requirements for professional training for child care providers before they can work with children and in specific areas of child development and guidance, health and child abuse prevention.

■ There are discrepancies between what parents assume about licensing protections and what protections are actually afforded. Consumer education is needed to provide parents with accurate information about the regulation and monitoring of licensed programs and help them make informed decisions about their child's care.

■ As our community begins the slow process of economic recovery and more parents return to the workforce, active engagement of the business community in support of policies for families with young children will be necessary.

■ The development of employer consortiums and public-private partnerships to encourage on- or near-site child care options for employees, particularly in commercial and business districts, could bring new energy and solutions to support working families.●

