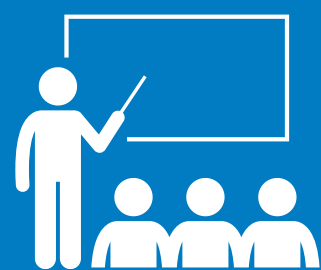


Early Educators' & Families' Experiences with the Early Care and Education System in Minnesota

Insights from Surveys and Focus Groups

From November 2023 to April 2024, Child Trends surveyed and conducted focus groups with **319** families and **433** early educators from licensed early care and education (ECE) programs. The early educators who participated included family child care owners and administrators in center-based programs. This fact sheet summarizes key findings related to educators' and families' experiences, reflections, and needs related to ECE in Minnesota.

This study was funded by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families as part of an evaluation of Parent Aware. You can read the full report [here](#) or visit the Child Trends project [webpage](#) for more information about the evaluation and view other reports of our findings.



Early educators' experiences with Minnesota's ECE system

Throughout both the survey and focus groups, early educators noted challenges their programs are facing and additional supports they need to address those challenges.

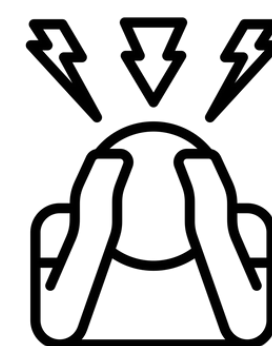
Staffing shortages are a key stressor impacting center-based programs.

64%

of center educators said **staffing challenges**—including **high turnover** and **difficulty finding qualified staff**—were one of their top two stressors in the last year.

15%

of all early educators reported that they were **likely to leave the ECE field** in the next year.



Early educators need higher wages and more robust benefits.

64%

of center educators

and

43%

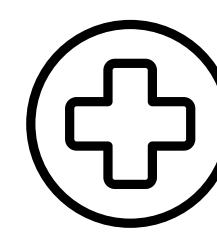
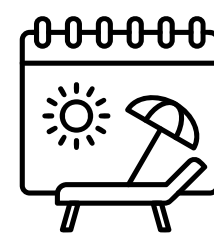
of family child care educators

who said they were likely to leave the ECE field named **low compensation** as a key reason for why they might leave.

When asked about **supports they need most** to manage stressors:

56% of early educators said they need increased pay, sick leave/personal time off, and health benefits.

54% of early educators said they need financial assistance or grants.



Early educators would benefit from more professional support and connections.

44%

of center educators

and

31%

of family child care educators

who said they were likely to leave the field named **lack of respect for the ECE profession** as a key reason for why they might leave.

Early educators said they need the following **supports to help their programs succeed**:

- More opportunities to connect with and learn from other educators
- More professional development, training, and ongoing learning opportunities
- Mental health and wellness supports
- Less burdensome regulations

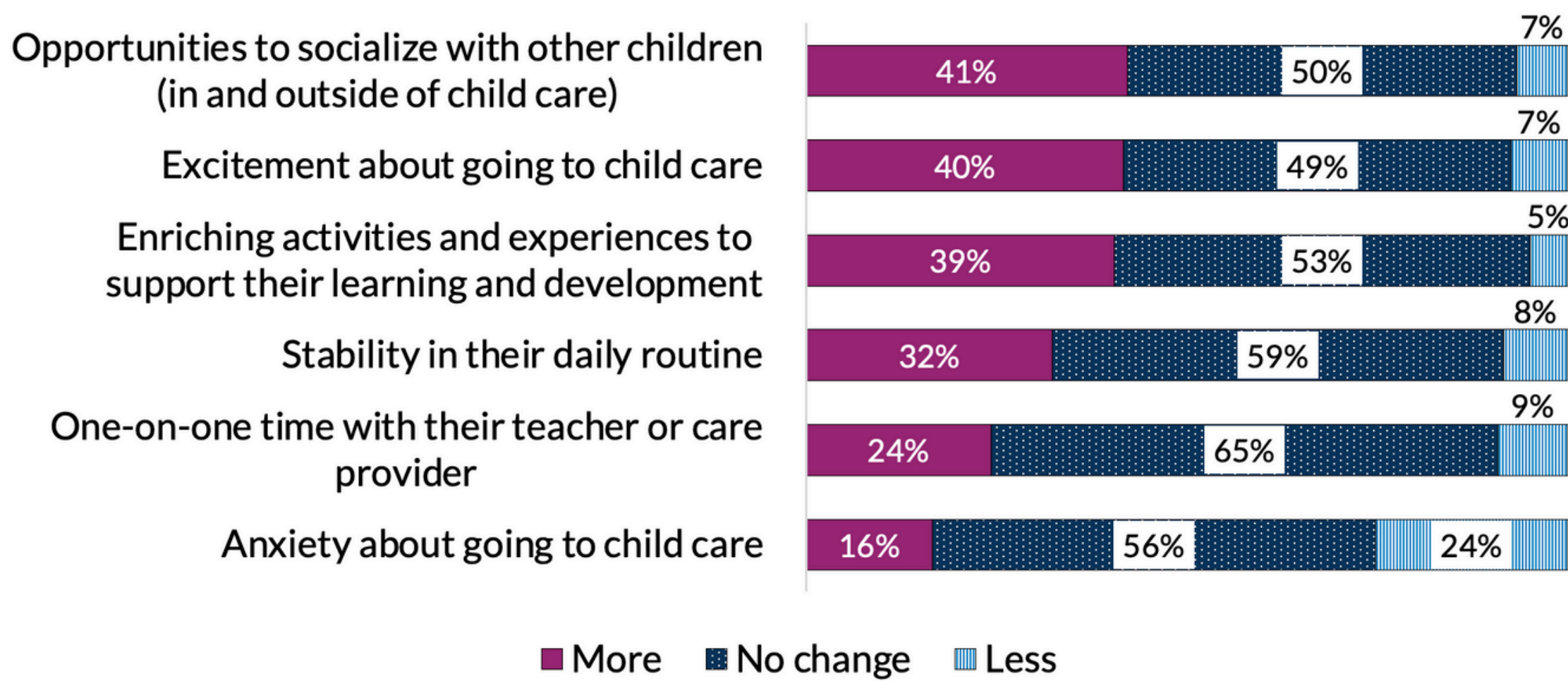


Families' experiences accessing ECE

Many families observed positive changes in their children's experiences in ECE in the last year. However, some challenges related to accessing care continue to persist.

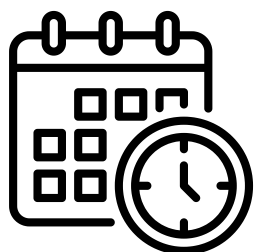
Since the COVID-19 pandemic, families have noticed some positive changes in children's experiences with ECE.

In the last year, respondents' children had more of, less of, or no change with the following:

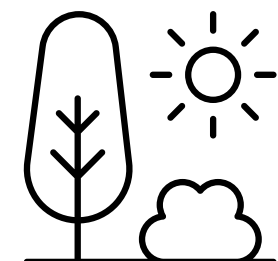
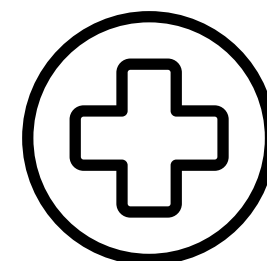


About **half of families** reported no change in their children's experiences in ECE since January 2023, but many reported some **positive changes**.

Families would like to see some of the changes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic continue into the future.



Families appreciated their ECE program offering **more flexible scheduling options** or **remote learning activities** for days children couldn't attend in person.



Families would like to see **increased health and safety procedures** and **more outdoor activities** for children continue.

Many families still face significant challenges in accessing child care.

When families cannot find ECE, some have to rely on family and friends for support or leave their jobs due to long waitlists and limited availability.

36%

"We were not able to find infant daycare after she was born, so I actually had to quit my job. Everything that's around here had at least a year or two waitlist for infants. So yeah, **I made the decision to quit because we couldn't find the care**, didn't have family or anything around to help either."

- Family focus group participant

of families reported difficulty finding an ECE program that met their needs and had openings.