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Report | May 2023

Parent Preferences in Family, Friend, Neighbor, and Nanny Care

A Study of Family, Friend, Neighbor (FFN), and Nanny Care in California - Part One

By Anna Powell, Tobi Adejumo, Lea J.E. Austin, and Abby Copeman Petig



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Introduction

Parents in California encounter a complex landscape of early care and education (ECE) options for their young children (King et al., 2019). Not only must they seek out opportunities that fit their budget and their schedule, but they also strive to find a safe, loving environment in which their children will grow and learn. For some families, parental care is the solution; however, we find that most families prefer and need to use one or more forms of child care on a regular basis. Likewise, no single care arrangement will be suitable for all families. As such, many Californians use multiple arrangements for their children under age six.

Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care is a key piece of the intricate puzzle of child care in the United States (National Women's Law Center, 2016, 2018). FFN and nanny caregivers provide care that is a critical component of early care and education, particularly for families with nontraditional work hours or that live in rural areas (DiMatteo, 2019; Schilder et al., 2022). Similar to the licensed workforce in child care centers and family child care (FCC) programs, FFN and nanny caregivers are disproportionately women of color, low income, immigrant or refugee, and speakers of languages like Spanish, when compared to the statewide population (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2016; Park & Flores Peña, 2021). They face significant challenges, including low pay and a lack of clarity regarding regulations. In California, some caregivers receive payments through state programs such as CalWORKS and the Alternative Payment Program (APP), while others are paid directly by parents, work in exchange for nonmonetary goods or services, or receive no form of payment. Subsidy programs like APP are typically oversubscribed and cannot cover all eligible families.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates there are more than 4.5 million FFN caregivers in the United States, most of whom are related to the children in their care. The study further estimates that 24.6 percent of children birth to age five are cared for by a relative (Corcoran & Steinley, 2019). Our study finds a consistent proportion of families in California use relative care: approximately 24.9 percent of parents.

This report is the first in a series that will highlight the experience of FFN and nanny caregivers and the families they support. The purpose of this report is to highlight parental ECE choices—both current and ideal—and the role of family, friends, neighbors, and nannies in child care arrangements. Subsequent briefs will present data on the characteristics of the caregivers themselves, including their typical arrangements, compensation, well-being, and support.

Clarifying Early Care and Education Terms

Early care and education terminology can be confusing. In this report, we will use these terms to describe the early care and education (ECE) options in California:

Center-based care: Licensed and regulated early care and education housed at a facility or school. Programs include day care centers, Head Start, or faith-based nursery schools.

Family child care (FCC) provider: A licensed and regulated ECE business that provides care in the home of an ECE professional.

Nanny, nanny share, or au pair care: Often simplified as "nanny care," these terms all refer to a paid arrangement with someone who is not otherwise connected to the family.

Family, friend, or neighbor (FFN) care: Care provided by any family member other than a parent or by a nonrelative who is not a professional caregiver (e.g., nanny). Care may be paid or unpaid.

Sometimes, we will group some of these categories together in our report. The two terms below serve as umbrella terms.

Licensed care: FCC and center care may be grouped using this term.

License-exempt care: FFNs and nannies do not require a license to operate, so they may be grouped using this term. Our study focuses on this group of caregivers.

Where possible, we distinguish between FFNs and nannies in this report. This differs from other studies that often use "FFN care" to mean any license-exempt arrangement (thus erasing or obscuring the presence of nannies). By distinguishing FFNs and nannies, we hope to explore the nuances in these care arrangements and their value to parents.

About the Study

In 2022, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) launched the Study of Family, Friend, Neighbor, and Nanny Care in California. While our research activities are being conducted in California, we expect the findings will be informative to stakeholders interested in supporting FFN caregiving across states. The study comprises four components: two surveys of parents with children under age six, one survey of their FFN caregivers, and focus groups with FFN caregivers. CSCCE partnered with the RAPID Survey Project at the Stanford Center on Early Childhood to implement the survey components. This brief highlights findings from the initial parent survey, which took place between August and September 2022.

Our study aims to expand the knowledge base around the utilization and nature of FFN arrangements, as well as the experiences and well-being of FFN providers themselves. This study also seeks to inform effective strategies for reaching and engaging with FFN providers to allow for additional resources, training, and support in service of their caregiving roles. Our first phase of research, the parent survey, serves two purposes: first, to establish the importance of FFN care to families; and second, to help us develop a sample of FFN caregivers for the subsequent survey and focus groups.

The first component of the study, the parent survey, explored the types and combinations of caregiving arrangements that parents use for their young children. Additionally, we investigated the factors that drove parental utilization of caregiving arrangements, especially FFN care, including the role of cost, availability, convenience/timing, community culture, and personal connection.

In developing the study, we partnered with the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (the Network) and Parent Voices. Both organizations gave valuable feedback on the design of the study, as well as support in circulating the link to parents for the first survey. Additionally, Parent Voices worked with CSCCE to convene a Parent Advisory Group. Six parent advocates joined the Parent Advisory Group, which held listening sessions in March 2023 to discuss the data. For the list of participants, refer to the **Acknowledgements** at the end of this report.

About the Parent Survey Data

In the fall of 2022, we surveyed 1,310 parents of children under age six in California. The survey contained approximately 50 questions. We gathered data on their family composition, demographics, and use of early care and education. The study explored the nature of the ECE arrangements by age group: first, children under age three (under 36 months), also known as infants and toddlers; and second, children age 3 to 5 (36 to 71 months), or preschool-age children. Parents who reported one or more care arrangements with an FFN provider also received questions about their relationship and their personal characteristics. Our survey distinguished nannies as a separate form of early care and education—though both forms of care may be a paid arrangement. As such, parents who rely on both a family member and a nanny could describe these arrangements separately.

To align our work with previous surveys of parents, CSCCE adapted some core questions from statewide and national instruments. For example, CSCCE considered questions from the Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019) and the National Survey of Early Care and Education (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2021). We also adapted several core questions from the RAPID Survey child care module (RAPID-EC, 2022) and the Network's 2020 COVID-19 Parent Study (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2020). Our instrument, however, differs from these surveys as it specifically explores FFN and nanny care arrangements, recognizing their distinctive role in supporting parents and their unique value to parents. Moreover, the parent surveys form only one part of the broader CSCCE study of FFN care.

Because our study relies on non-random sampling, the resulting dataset does not provide a representative cross-section of California parents. Despite this limitation, the survey reached parents throughout the state, across income levels, and across racial and ethnic identities. To minimize potential bias caused by our non-random approach, we implemented a post-stratification strategy and weighted our data by area median income and racial/ethnic identity. This approach reduces, but does not eliminate, differences between our sample and the underlying population of California. All tables in our report, unless otherwise noted, provide weighted estimates. For additional information on the weighting methodology, refer to the **Technical Appendices**.[1]

1 The appendices are contained in a separate document. Please visit the publication webpage to view.

Core Findings

The existing literature on license-exempt caregivers suggests that grandparents are the most common providers of this type of child care. The National Center for Education Statistics finds that parents of all income levels use this type of care (Corcoran & Steinley, 2019). Our study reinforces these findings, providing California-specific data on the prevalence of FFN and nanny care.

Family, friend, or neighbor care is a common choice with deep value to parents.

- We estimate 26 percent of parents with children under age three rely on an FFN caregiver, along with 29 percent of parents with children age three to five. Nanny, nanny share, or au pair care is less common: around 12 percent of parents with children under age three hire nannies, along with 9 percent of parents with children age three to five.
- FFN care is most prevalent among Black families, and nanny care is most prevalent among White families. While FFN care is found at similar levels across household incomes, the use of nanny care increases with parent earnings.
- For parents leveraging two or more forms of early care and education, one of the providers is almost always an FFN or nanny: 84 percent of children under age three and 94 percent of children age three to five in multiple ECE arrangements have an FFN caregiver and/or nanny.

Parents weigh multiple factors in their ECE decision making.

- Parents using FFN or nanny care rate "cultural background" and "language(s) spoken" as very important to their decisions more frequently than parents using other types of care. Meanwhile, factors such as "health and safety," "close to home or work," and "it just felt right" do not vary much by care arrangement.
- Parents living at or above 120-percent area median income (AMI) rated most of the decision-making factors "very important" less often than parents in other income groups.
- Black and Latine parents with infants and toddlers were more likely to agree that "cultural background" was very important. For children age three to five, "learning opportunities" were most often "very important" to Asian and Latine parents.

Approximately one in five parents see their current ECE arrangements as ideal. Additionally, families have vastly different definitions of their ideal.

- For children under age three, Latine parents were most likely (21 percent) to say that their current arrangement matched their ideal, and Asian parents were least likely (10 percent). For children age three to five, White parents were most likely (35 percent) to already have their ideal, and Asian parents were least likely (13 percent).
- Among parents of infants and toddlers, 22 percent who use only FFN care agreed that their current arrangement was the same as their ideal, along with 27 percent of parents who use nannies. Among parents with children age three to five, the share is lower: 16 percent of parents who use only FFN care and 7 percent of parents who use nannies. For this older age group, parents more often indicated their current arrangement was ideal when they had a combination of caregivers (usually FFN or nanny care in tandem with licensed enrollment).
- Parents living below 80-percent AMI were least likely to see a combination of options as ideal, regardless of the age of their child (17 percent of parents with children under age three and 16 percent of parents with children age three to five). Parents in the Bay Area were most likely to see a combination of arrangements as ideal: 38 percent of parents with children under age three and 33 percent of parents with children age three to five.

Payment in cash is less common for FFN caregivers, but both FFNs and nannies often receive nonmonetary compensation.

- While nannies are paid by definition, 28 percent of FFN caregivers do not receive anything in return for the care they provide.
- Parents who use FFN care pay a median of $160 per week (when payment is provided at all). On the other hand, parents who employ nannies pay $430 per week.
- Around 48 percent of parents who use FFN care provide nonmonetary compensation, along with 60 percent who use nanny care. Nonmonetary exchange may be in addition to cash payment. The most common example is help with a caregiver's food, supplies, or transportation.

FFN and nanny care hold unique value to parents, and California's policies should empower families who use it and/or wish they could.

- Policy discourse should embrace a more expansive and flexible understanding of parents' wants and needs for care: not only do parents' choices vary, but they also vary in their definition of an ideal.
- Parents of color are less likely to have access to their ideal. Parents should be included in policy development to help California's child care system evolve in an equitable direction.

Finally, this research on parental preferences and the importance of FFN and nanny care reflects only the first portion of our study.

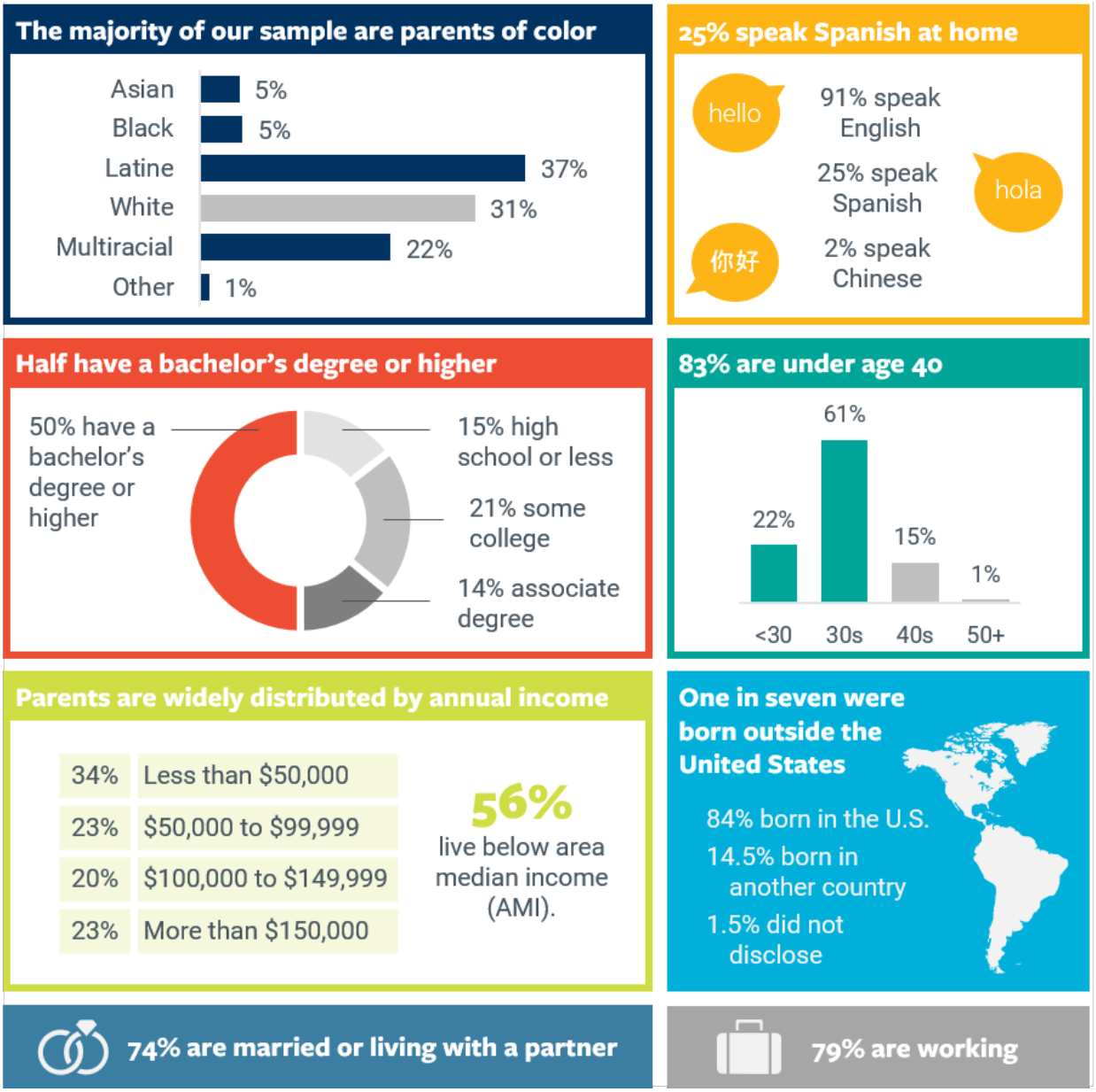
- We are also conducting survey and focus group research with FFN and nanny caregivers themselves.
- In tandem with our parent survey, we aim to expand the knowledge base around the utilization and nature of license-exempt care arrangements, as well as the experiences and well-being of the caregivers themselves.

Parent and Family Characteristics

About one half of our parent sample have an infant or toddler under age three, and three quarters have a preschool-age child three to five years old. One quarter of the parents have two or more children across these ages. In addition, nearly one half of the parent sample have one or more children age six or older. The majority of respondents were women (89 percent) and live in two-parent households (74 percent). **Figure 1** provides an overview of the demographics of the study sample.

FIGURE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE STUDY SAMPLE

California Parents, 2022



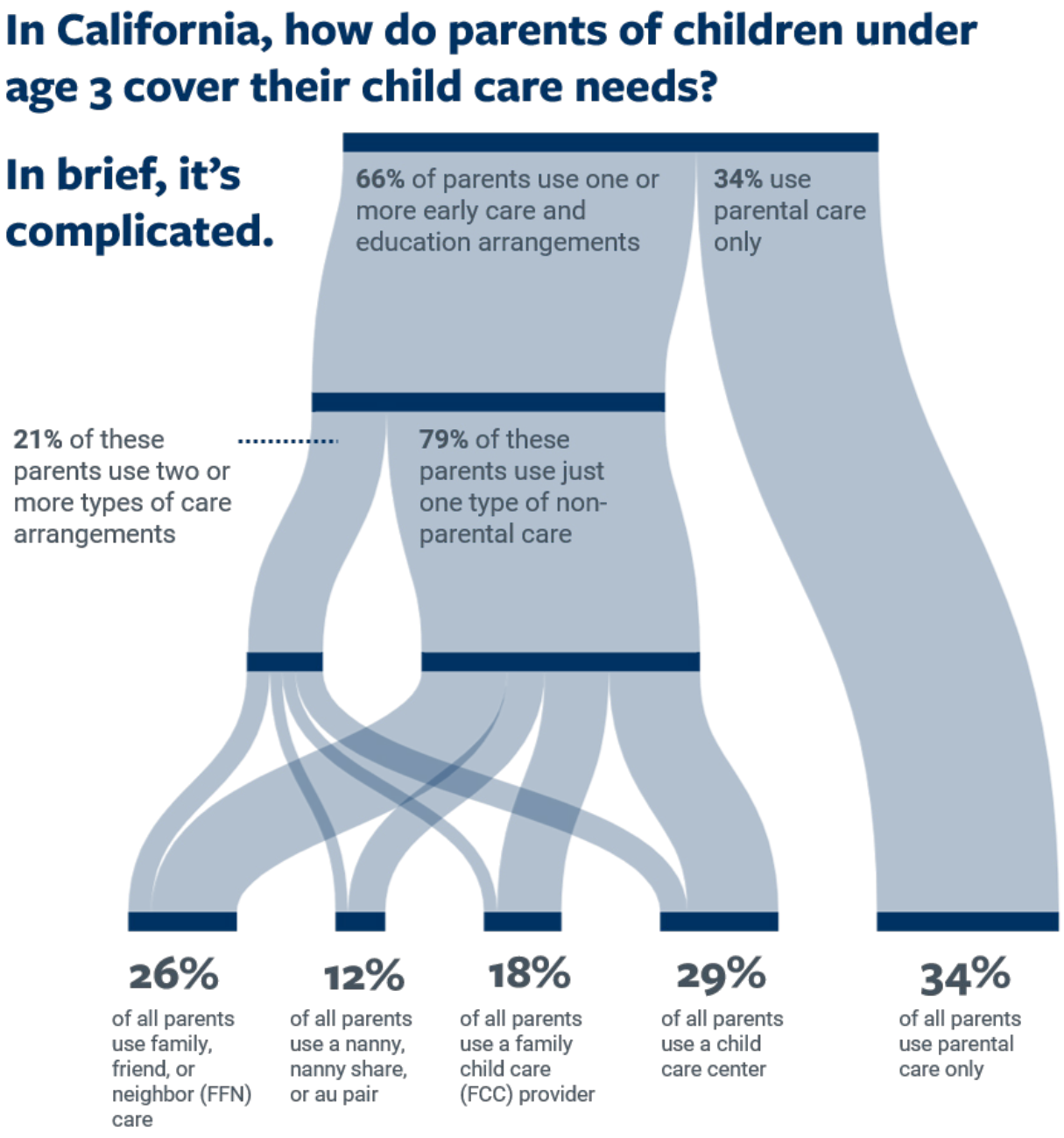
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
N=1,229-1,298

Early Care and Education Arrangements

Our study asked parents whether they relied on any form of early care and education for their children. We further asked which of four types of care they used, with the option to select more than one: family, friend, or neighbor care; nanny, nanny share, or au pair care; family child care; or center-based care. **Figure 2** and **Figure 3** show the distribution of ECE arrangements by the age of the child. These figures, however, do not necessarily reflect parental preferences. They also mask an inequitable array of constraints such as availability, cost, and language spoken.

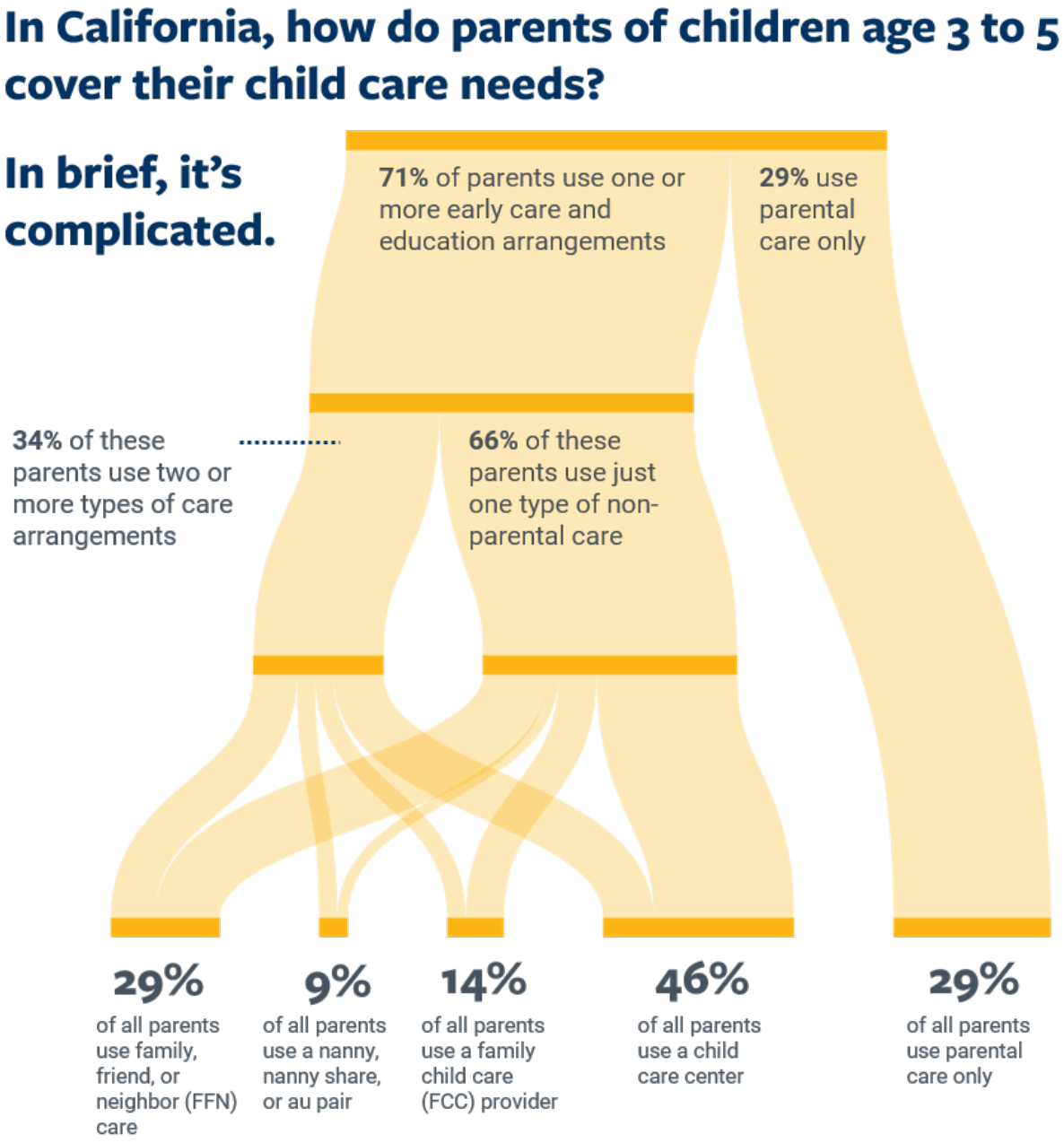
FFN care is a common form of early care and education: we estimate 26 percent of parents of infants and toddlers rely on an FFN caregiver, along with 29 percent of parents with children age three to five. Nanny, nanny share, or au pair care is less common: around 12 percent of parents with children under age three hire nannies, along with 9 percent of parents with children age three to five.

FIGURE 2. HOW CALIFORNIA PARENTS OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE THREE COVER CHILD CARE NEEDS



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Data were collected in 2022. Bottom row does not sum to 100 percent because some parents use more than one child care arrangement (excluding parent-only care).
N=612

FIGURE 3. HOW CALIFORNIA PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGE THREE TO FIVE COVER CHILD CARE NEEDS



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Data were collected in 2022. Chart does not include hours enrolled in transitional kindergarten or kindergarten. Bottom row does not sum to 100 percent because some parents use more than one child care arrangement (excluding parent-only care). N=975

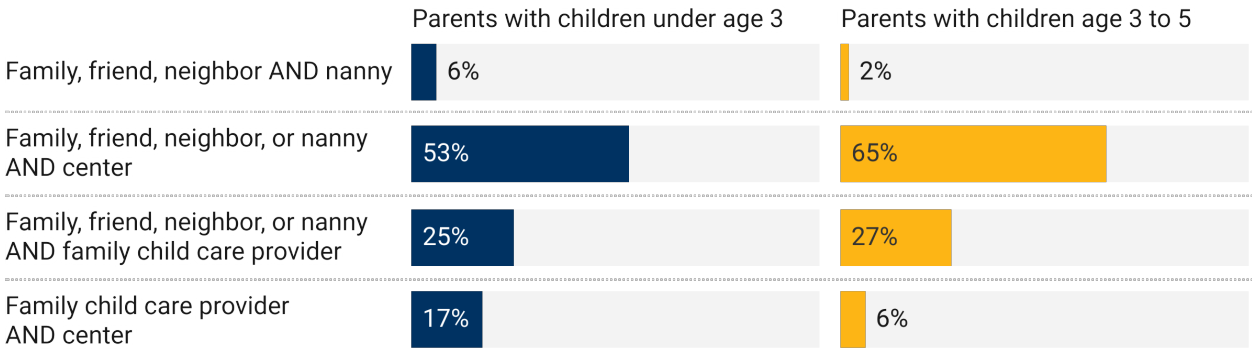
Parents' use of care varies by racial and ethnic identity and income level. For instance, Black parents are most likely to use FFN care: 34 percent with children under age three, and 31 percent with children age three to five. Nanny care, by contrast, is more prevalent among White parents: 17 percent with children under age three and 11 percent with children age three to five. Use of nanny care, however, is tightly linked to income. For children under age three, for instance, only 3 percent of parents with low incomes (below 80-percent AMI) have a nanny, while 27 percent of parents with at least 120-percent AMI choose nanny care. Refer to the **Technical Appendices** for tables by race/ethnicity, income, and region.

For parents leveraging two or more forms of early care and education, one of the providers is very often an FFN or nanny.

For parents leveraging two or more forms of early care and education, one of the providers is very often an FFN or nanny. Among parents with children under age three in multiple ECE arrangements, 84 percent include an FFN and or nanny, as do 94 percent of parents with children age three to five. **Figure 4** provides the distribution of care combinations. In this case, because of the smaller number of parents who combine care arrangements, we show licensed arrangements (center and family child care) in combination with FFN or nanny care, rather than specifying which of the two the parent uses.

FIGURE 4. COMBINATIONS OF CARE ARRANGEMENTS

California Parents, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Nanny care may include a nanny share or au pair.
N=80 (parents with children under age 3), 214 (parents with children age 3 to 5)

Factors in Selecting Early Care and Education

Early care and education decisions do not happen in isolation: housing, employment, and familial decisions all take place simultaneously. For instance, a parent's preference for FFN or nanny care in the evening or weekends would likely flow from the parent's work schedule. The literature indicates that parents make trade-offs based on their work and family circumstances, as well as knowledge of care alternatives (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). We sought to provide a holistic view of their decisions by exploring preference factors. Additionally, we asked parents about their current arrangements and ideal arrangements separately. **Table 1** provides parents' ratings of 10 individual factors in selecting their current arrangements.

TABLE 1. IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS IN CHOOSING CURRENT ECE ARRANGEMENTS

California Parents, 2022

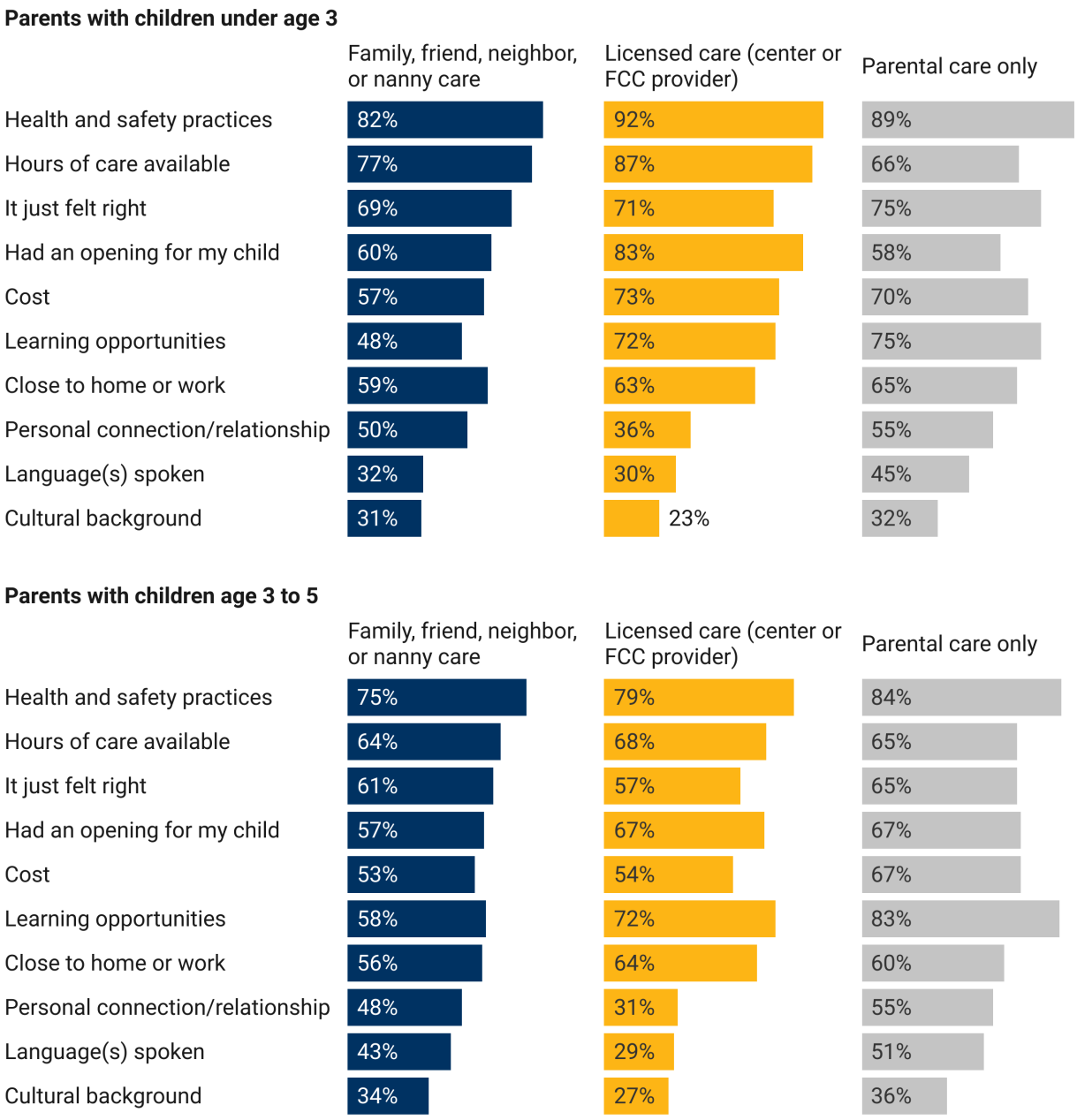
	Not important at all	A little important	Somewhat important	Very important
Parents with children under age 3				
Health and safety practices	1%	2%	10%	88%
Hours of care available	3%	3%	18%	76%
It just felt right	1%	8%	19%	72%
Had an opening for my child	7%	8%	18%	67%
Cost	3%	8%	22%	67%
Learning opportunities	3%	9%	24%	65%
Close to home or work	3%	7%	27%	63%
Personal connection/relationship	13%	19%	21%	47%
Language(s) spoken	17%	18%	30%	36%
Cultural background	22%	22%	28%	29%
Parents with children age 3 to 5				
Health and safety practices	1%	4%	16%	79%
Hours of care available	4%	8%	23%	66%
It just felt right	4%	9%	27%	60%
Had an opening for my child	4%	9%	23%	63%
Cost	5%	15%	23%	57%
Learning opportunities	2%	10%	19%	70%
Close to home or work	3%	10%	27%	60%
Personal connection/relationship	13%	18%	25%	44%
Language(s) spoken	14%	17%	29%	40%
Cultural background	18%	21%	29%	32%

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: This table includes our entire parent sample—even those who opt only for parental care of their child.
N=593-600 (parents with children under age 3), 929-945 (parents with children age 3 to 5)

While care preferences vary based on family circumstances, we find some decision factors may also correlate with the type of arrangement. A similar share of parents utilizing FFN, nanny, or parental care noted that "cultural background" and "personal connection" were very important in their decision making. On other factors, parents using parental care and licensed child care are aligned, with a similar proportion of these parents reporting that "learning opportunities" were very important. Meanwhile, factors such as "health and safety," "close to home or work," and "it just felt right" do not vary much by care arrangement. **Figure 5** shows the proportion of parents who rated each factor "very important" by care type.

FIGURE 5. "VERY IMPORTANT" DECISION FACTORS, BY CARE ARRANGEMENT

California Parents, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Note: Nanny care may refer to a nanny share or au pair. Additionally, parents who selected FFN or nanny care in combination with licensed care are counted in the first column only.

N=593-600 (parents with children under age 3), 929-945 (parents with children age 3 to 5)

Parent ratings of the importance of factors varied somewhat by their background (race/ethnicity, income, and region). Among parents of infants and toddlers, for instance, cost was rated "very important" most often by Black and Latine parents (84 and 76 percent, respectively). Parents with low incomes showed a similar rating for cost, with 80 percent ranking this factor as "very important"—about twice as often as higher-income parents. In fact, most factors were less often "very important" for parents living at or above 120-percent AMI.

Black and Latine parents with infants and toddlers were more likely to agree that "cultural background" was very important in making their choice of child care.

Black and Latine parents with children under age three were also more likely to agree that "cultural background" was very important (39 percent and 38 percent, respectively), as well as finding "an opening for my child" (75 percent and 74 percent, respectively). When comparing the data by region, "cultural background" was ranked highest by parents of infants and toddlers in Central California (41 percent "very important"), while "an opening for my child" was ranked lowest when compared to other regions (61 percent "very important").

For parents with children age three to five, the statewide share of "very important" rankings fell slightly below the rankings for infants and toddlers. One important exception was "learning opportunities." The preference was greatest among Asian and Latine parents of preschool-age children (79 and 78 percent, respectively). When comparing the data by region, this factor was ranked highest by parents with children age three to five in Central California (80 percent "very important") and lowest in Los Angeles (55 percent). On the other hand, parents of preschool-age children in Northern California were most often concerned with finding an opening (72 percent). Refer to the **Technical Appendices** to view tables by race/ethnicity, income, and California region.

During discussions with the Parent Advisory Group, CSCCE researchers shared elements of **Figure 5**. Several members stressed that with FFN or nanny care, it may be more feasible to achieve more of the factors simultaneously. In other words, because many FFNs have an existing connection to the families in their care, some of the personal dimensions such as "cultural background" are readily available. Additionally, the Parent Advisory Group shared the opinion that "health and safety" often implies trust and familiarity, which a relative or friend can typically provide.

Similarly, FFN and nanny care may be more flexible than a licensed child care provider when it comes to taking a sick child. The caregiver may even take them to the doctor so the parent doesn't have to miss work.

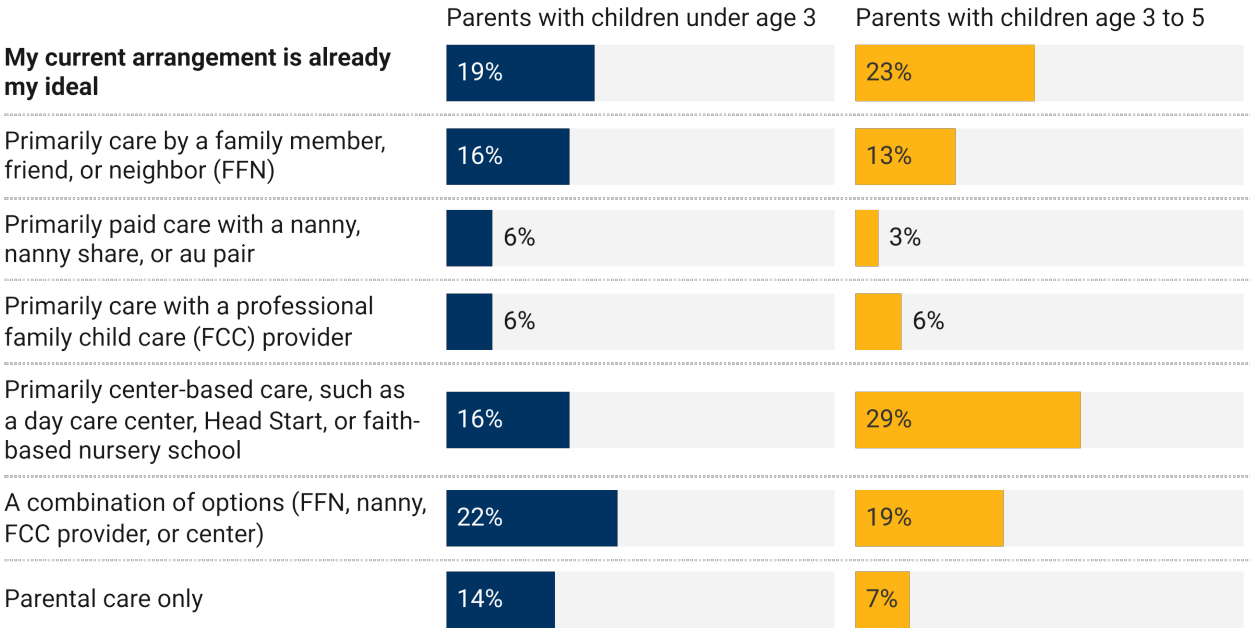
For parents who choose an FFN or nanny caregiver, these are all components of what makes it "feel right" for their child: the parent can minimize their guilt and anxiety about choosing a care arrangement. Members of the Parent Advisory Group agreed that FFN and nanny arrangements often come with a deep connection—and in many cases, unconditional love.

Ideal Arrangements

Following parents' rating of ECE decision factors, we asked parents to imagine their ideal arrangements, setting aside any constraints. Specifically, we asked parents to imagine that their care choices were not limited by cost, location, COVID-19, or availability. As shown in **Figure 6**, only one out of five parents considered their current arrangement to be ideal. In some cases, parents' ideal shared elements of their current circumstances, but most parents would prefer a different configuration.

FIGURE 6. IDEAL EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ARRANGEMENTS

California Parents, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Participants could select only one option.
N=607 (parents with children under age 3), 969 (parents with children age 3 to 5)

Among parents with children under age three, Latine parents were most likely to say their current arrangement matched their ideal (21 percent), and Asian parents were least likely (10 percent). Black parents were most likely to prefer a combination of options (30 percent). For parents with children age three to five, White parents were most likely to already have their ideal arrangement (35 percent), and again, Asian parents were least likely (13 percent). Black parents were most likely to prefer center care (32 percent).

Parents living below 80-percent AMI were least likely to see a combination of options as ideal for either age group (17 percent of parents with children under age three and 16 percent of parents with children age three to five). When comparing California regions, Los Angeles-based parents of infants and toddlers were least likely to say their current arrangement was ideal (13 percent). The Bay Area was most likely to see a combination of arrangements as ideal: 38 percent of parents with children under age three and 33 percent of parents with children age three to five. Refer to the **Technical Appendices** for tables by race/ethnicity, income, and region.

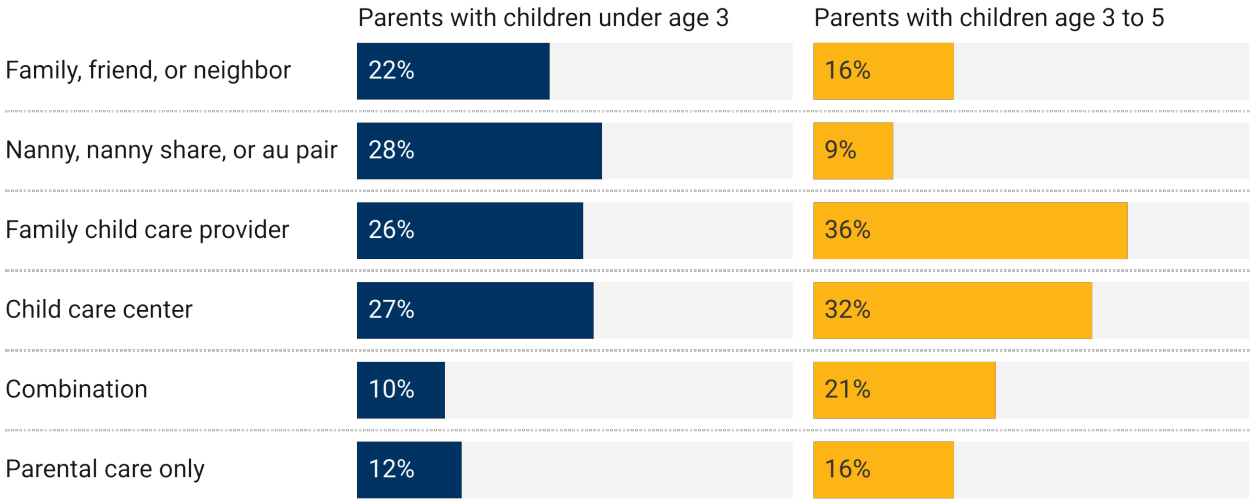
Only one out of five parents considered their current child care arrangements to be ideal.

Statewide, a minority of parents considered their current arrangement ideal. In looking deeper at this group, we found that parents with infants and toddlers considered their existing arrangement ideal more often when they used a single type of care (22 to 27 percent of parents using each care type; see **Figure 7**). Among parents with children in this age group, those parents relying on themselves only or multiple forms of care were less likely to see their arrangement as ideal (12 percent each).

Among parents with children age three to five, however, the distribution shifted: parents enrolling their child in a licensed setting were most likely to see their current arrangement as ideal (36 percent for FCC providers and 32 percent for centers). Combined child care arrangements ranked next, with 20 percent of parents finding more than one type of care ideal. FFN and parental care arrangements were less often ideal for this age group (16 percent), with nanny care lowest at 9 percent. **Figure 7** gives the proportion of parents who agreed their current arrangement was already ideal, grouped by care setting.

FIGURE 7. PROPORTION OF CURRENT CARE ARRANGEMENTS RATED AS IDEAL, BY CURRENT UTILIZATION TYPE

California Parents, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: The percentages in **Figure 7** reflect the current arrangements of parents who selected "my current arrangement is already my ideal," as shown in **Figure 6**. Most combinations include a license-exempt caregiver.
N=607 (parents with children under age 3), 969 (parents with children age 3 to 5)

Together, **Figures 6** and **7** reveal the complexity and intimate nature of caregiving decisions for young children. While most parents see a gap between their current and ideal situation, there is no clear consensus on any single setting or combination of care options. The personal nature of the decision requires a strong mixed-delivery system, so parents can move between care options as their needs change. Policies that lift up and support caregivers across settings are crucial to honoring California's families.

Choosing an ideal ECE arrangement is a personal decision that requires a strong mixed-delivery system, so parents can move between care options as their needs change. Policies that lift up and support caregivers across settings are crucial to honoring California's families.

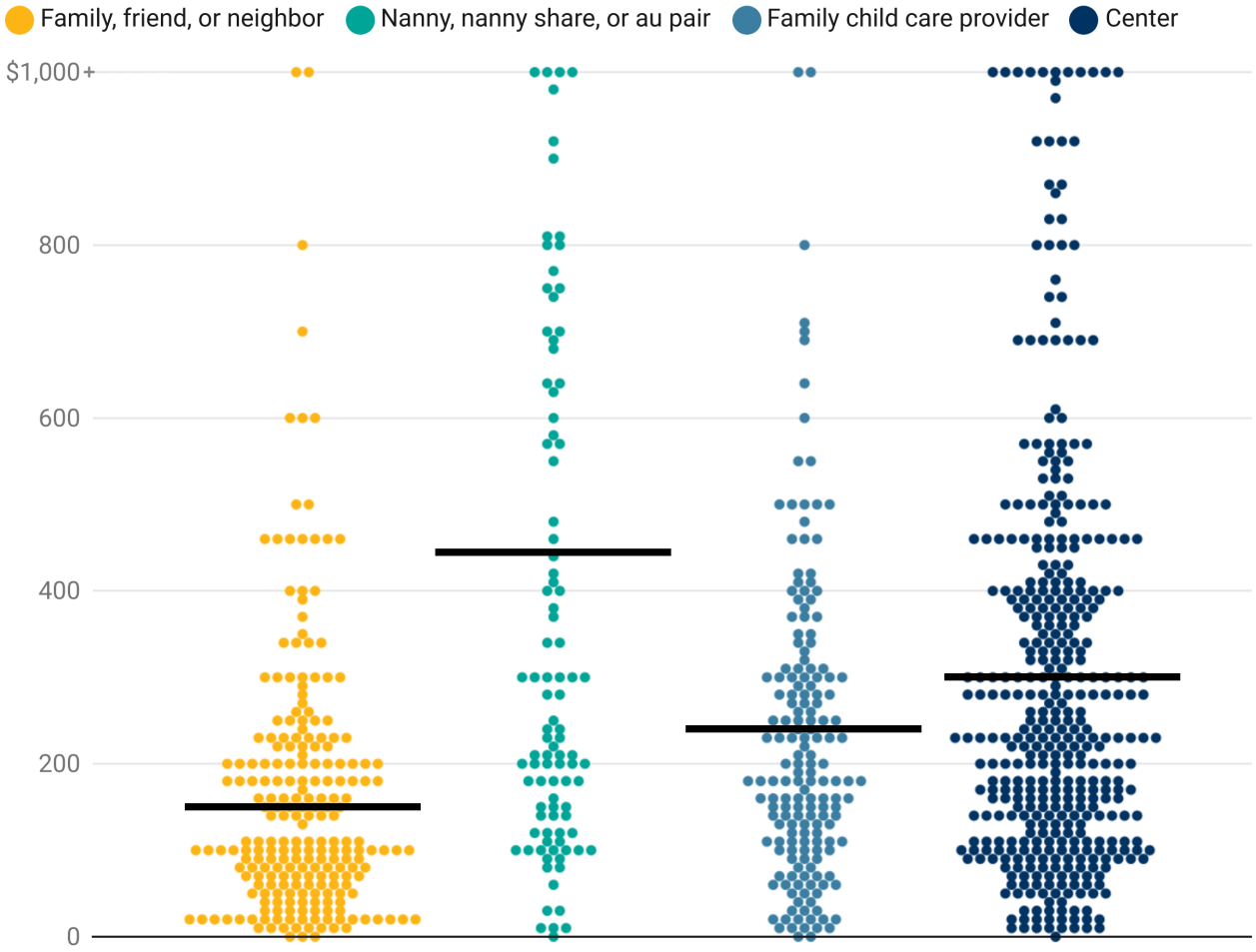
In our discussion with the Parent Advisory Group, some members pointed out that in an ideal arrangement, parents would have the flexibility to set aside some of the practical factors found in **Table 1**. For instance, the factors of cost and openings are limitations that disproportionately affect families with low incomes, though the stress of finding and paying for care poses a challenge for families across income levels. The Parent Advisory Group agreed that subsidized funding could support their ideal arrangement by enabling them to pay a fair wage for an FFN or nanny caregiver.

Child Care Expenses

In addition to exploring cost among a set of factors that drive parental utilization of caregiving arrangements, our survey asked participants to write in how much they pay for each type of care. We estimate that parents with children in center-based care pay a median of $300 per week, while parents who use family child care pay $240 per week. Meanwhile, parents who compensate their FFN caregiver pay $160 per week, and parents who employ nannies pay $430 per week. **Figure 8** shows the distribution and median weekly expenditures on care for children under age six.

FIGURE 8. WEEKLY CHILD CARE EXPENSES, BY HOUSEHOLD AND CARE TYPE

California, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: Costs cover all children under the age of six in the household who participate in early care and education. The black bars denote median cost by care type.
N=645

Our data align with the findings of other studies that show California has some of the highest child care expenses in the country. Child Care Aware of America, for example, estimated California parents pay $18,201 for an infant in a center and $12,268 for licensed family child care (FCC) annually (Haynie et al., 2023). That study also found that national child care expenses in licensed settings have risen faster than inflation between 2017 and 2021, the most recent year data were available.

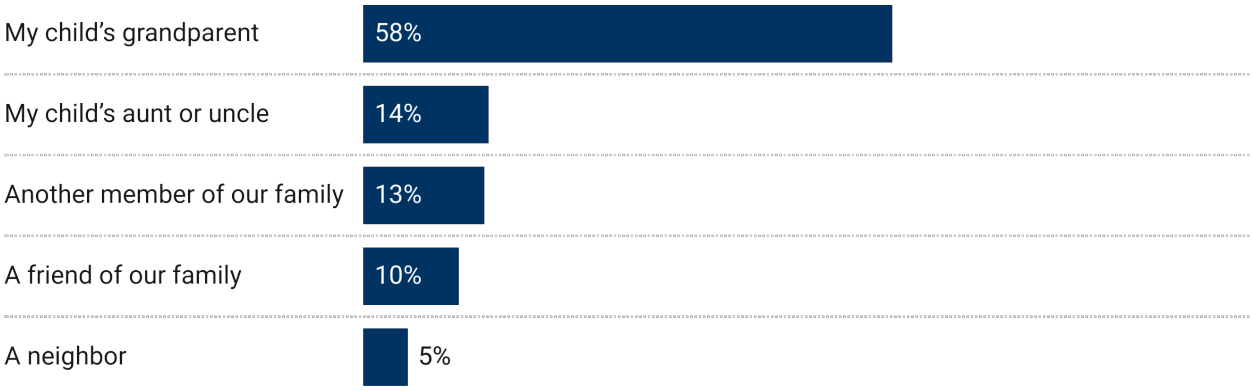
Features of Family, Friend, Neighbor, and Nanny Arrangements

Grandparents as Common Caregivers

The previous section helps illustrate the relative affordability of FFN care and the unaffordability of nanny care. Yet, cost is not the only factor that influences parental choice, and we see that many families would prefer FFN care as part of their ideal child care arrangement, even if they were unconstrained by cost or other factors (**Figure 6**). In the case of FFN care, this preference is inextricably linked to the existing trust and intimacy that the caregiver can offer. Specifically, **Figure 9** shows that 86 percent of the parents who use FFN care rely on a relative. Friends make up 10 percent and neighbors, the remaining 4 percent. (Nannies, nanny shares, and au pairs are analyzed separately.) Grandparents are the most common caregiver, representing about six out of ten FFNs.

FIGURE 9. RELATIONSHIP TO FAMILY, FRIEND, OR NEIGHBOR CAREGIVER

California Parents, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: In our studies, nannies are quantified separately.
N=401

Among parents who use FFN care, the relationship in our sample varied. Asian parents were most likely to have a grandparent caregiver (73 percent), and White parents were least likely to do so (50 percent). White parents were most likely to have a friend or neighbor caregiver, though this arrangement is relatively rare among FFN options (12 percent and 9 percent, respectively). Black parents and parents with low incomes had the greatest concentration of friend caregivers (11 percent and 14 percent, respectively). Parents using FFN care in Los Angeles were the most likely to depend on an aunt or uncle for care (20 percent). For tables by race/ethnicity, income, and California region, refer to the **Technical Appendices.**

Nonmonetary Compensation

The familial origin of many care arrangements introduces a complex array of pay arrangements and decision making on the part of families and providers. Several members of the Parent Advisory Group emphasized that payment is an important dimension that separates types of caregivers. A parent who pays their caregiver, whether related or unrelated, will be adding a "business" element to the relationship. In some cases, a parent may offer payment that their caregiver declines. Compensation can alter the dynamic between parent and caregiver, potentially resulting in greater pressures and/or expectations: when a parent pays for care, they may feel more comfortable including requirements, like asking for a more consistent schedule or for providing a second-language component to their care.

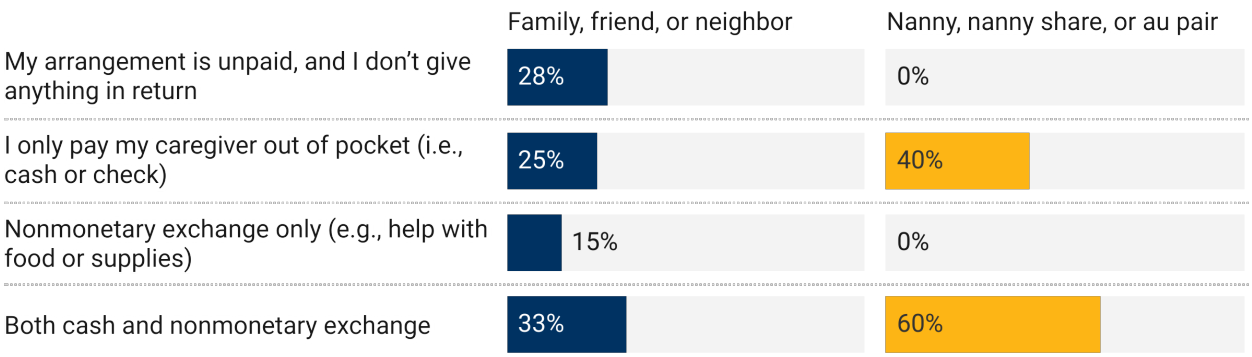
Approximately 28 percent of parents who use family, friend, or neighbor care provide no payment, monetary or otherwise.

We estimate that 28 percent of parents who use FFN care provide no payment, monetary or otherwise, even though their caregiver may be sacrificing paid work opportunities without the ability to recoup their salary. However, many families provide nonmonetary forms of payment, and some even combine cash payments with these alternatives.

Figure 10 details the types of payments families make by provider type. Notably, nannies are always paid, and 60 percent of families who utilize nannies provide both monetary and other forms of compensation. This stark contrast with FFN providers further underscores the need to understand these are distinctly different provider types. In a future publication, we will explore provider perspectives on the factors that influence their decisions to provide care and the role of payment.

FIGURE 10. PAYMENT AND NONMONETARY EXCHANGE, BY CAREGIVER TYPE

California Parents, 2022



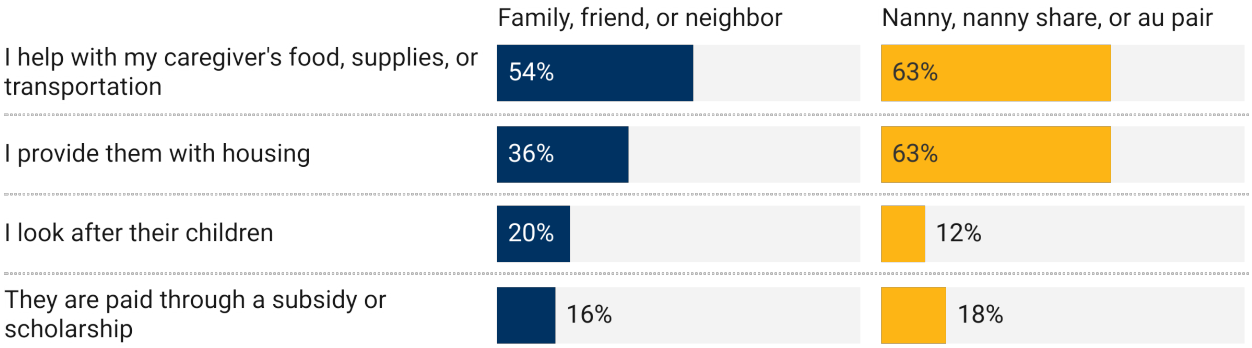
Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
N=389 (parents with family, friend, or neighbor caregivers), 139 (parents with nannies)

Our study reveals variation in parents' approaches to payment. Asian parents were less likely to provide nonmonetary exchange to their FFN caregiver, either alone (11 percent) or with cash (10 percent). Black parents, meanwhile, were more likely to compensate their FFN this way (23 percent nonmonetary only; 34 percent cash and nonmonetary). Interestingly, wholly unpaid FFN arrangements only increased slightly with income: 27 percent of parents below 80-percent AMI provided no compensation, along with 32 of parents at or above 120-percent AMI. In all regions, nonmonetary exchange was more often combined with cash than provided on its own, with particularly few nonmonetary-only arrangements in the high-cost Bay Area and Los Angeles areas. The **Technical Appendices** provide tables by race/ethnicity, income, and region.

Figure 11 shows the most common forms of nonmonetary exchange. Parents most commonly reported helping with their caregiver's food, supplies, or transportation for both FFNs and nannies. Among parents who participate in nonmonetary exchange, more than one half selected this option (54 percent for FFN caregivers; 63 percent for nannies). Meanwhile, 37 percent of parents who use nonmonetary exchange provide housing for their FFN caregiver, while 62 percent of parents who use nonmonetary exchange give housing to their nannies.

FIGURE 11. FORMS OF NONMONETARY EXCHANGE, BY CAREGIVER TYPE

California License-Exempt Caregivers, 2022



Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley
Note: This figure excludes arrangements that are paid only in cash or unpaid with no exchange. Additionally, columns do not sum to 100 percent because participants could select more than one option.
N=190 (parents with family, friend, or neighbor caregivers), 88 (parents with nannies)

In Their Words: Why Parents Rely on FFN or Nanny Care

In the course of our survey, we invited parents to describe in their own words why they chose their care arrangements. In this section, we examine the data from parents who rely on FFN or nanny care—either alone or in combination with other arrangements. We identified eight dominant themes in parents' open-ended responses, many of which also appear in **Table 1**: best environment for the child, convenience/scheduling, cost, COVID-19, culture and language, family bonding, shortages in licensed child care, and trust and safety.

Best Environment for the Child

Parents emphasized the importance of selecting the best environment for their child, given the young one's particular interests and needs. Parents described FFN and nanny care as more intimate settings that afford children deeper attention and interaction from their caregiver. In some cases, negative experiences in licensed care settings have prompted parents to view FFN or nanny care as a better fit.

> *"My child was previously in a center-based day care, but my child was constantly getting sick. I also felt like my child wasn't getting the one-on-one learning experience. It was understandable as the day care had about 20+ other children. My child's new provider became available, and I decided it was time to try something new. It was the best decision, as my child's new provider was a teacher and my child would be the only one being looked after. So far it has been the best decision, as my child is thriving a lot more."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Orange County in a household earning $50,000 to $75,000*

> *"It seemed like the best option for my son, he needed more time for personal growth prior to entering kindergarten. Not all children are ready for kindergarten at age five."*
>
> *— A White parent in Fresno County in a household earning more than $150,000*

> *"Only family can handle the care of my autistic son. The local day care mistreated him when he previously attended."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Riverside County in a household earning $25,000 to $50,000*

Convenience/Scheduling

Convenience and flexibility of scheduling played a central role for many parents in our sample. Parents highlighted the limited availability of child care centers in their area, as well as the difficulty of fitting child care schedules in with their work schedules. In contrast, parents frequently associated FFN and nanny caregivers with convenience and flexibility.

> *"It's hard to fit* [a] *preschool schedule into my work schedule, along with my other child's schedule.* [*I am*] *unable to pick up both kids at different times and send them to their babysitter after school. It's a lot of running around throughout the day and going to work. Scheduling is a big factor in the current child care arrangement."*
>
> *— An Asian parent in Fresno County in a household earning $25,000 to $50,000*

> *"We chose my mother to be our caregiver for the first year of my son's life (he's currently six months old). She comes to our house and takes care of him while I work from home. It allows me to nurse and keep a great, consistent routine going with my child. I trust my mom deeply and am able to communicate very well with her. Since he is so young, his nap and feeding schedule are still changing fairly often. My mom is able to keep up with the constant change in his routines, give him individualized attention, and keep him engaged with age-appropriate developmental activities. She's also able to start earlier or later on days that I might need to start work earlier or work later. I'm also able to see him throughout the day, which is a huge plus and made the transition of going back to work after maternity leave a little bit easier."*
>
> *— An immigrant parent in Los Angeles County in a household earning more than $150,000*

> *"There were very few care centers that took children young enough (when we started looking). The only one that did have an opening, I could not imagine what my child's day was going to be like and how they would get in naps. A nanny allowed me to easily continue breastfeeding, as well."*
>
> *— A White parent in Alameda County in a household earning more than $150,000*

Cost

Many parents described the significant role cost plays in shaping their care choices. Frequently, parents cited the prohibitive cost of paid child care or child care centers as a reason for choosing an FFN or nanny. Among those who did provide payment to a relative caregiver, some felt more comfortable setting a "reasonable rate" with their own mother or mother-in-law.

> *"A family member felt more safe and the least expensive." -- A Latina parent in Los Angeles in a household earning $75,000 to $99,999*

> *"My mother and mother-in-law watch my child because I couldn't afford paying a child care center, the prices were outrageous. I don't qualify for subsidy, but I cannot afford a day care center. My mother-in-law and mother charge me a reasonable rate per day, and I know my son is safe and is learning our first language (Spanish)."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Solano County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"Both parents work, and we have to have care for her during the day. She is also highly social and thrives being around other kids. We're frustrated we have to wait an extra year for her to enroll in kindergarten because of her October birthday, and it will cost us an extra year of preschool that costs more than our mortgage."*
>
> *— A White parent in Contra Costa County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

COVID-19

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has played a role in parents' decisions to use FFN or nanny care. As child care programs temporarily closed or significantly limited capacity due to safety reasons, parents were forced to reconsider their child care options. In our study, parents echoed some of these experiences; some cited exposure concerns influencing their preference of FFN care, especially for their infants.

> *"We have my mother-in-law watch our son, and it benefits both [of] us as we can keep him and her safe from COVID and allowed us to help her financially, instead of paying for child care, and let her retire from her job."*
>
> *— An Asian parent in Sacramento County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"I work at night so I needed family to care for them at least 12 hours a week at night. I do 20 hours a week of day care to minimize the amount of time they are in a day care setting due to risk of COVID."*
>
> *— An Asian parent in Orange County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"With my mother, I'm not worried about him getting exposed to illnesses or COVID in a day care setting. Since he's still very young, he hasn't completed all of his vaccinations yet and has not yet received the COVID vaccine. I feel safer having him not exposed while he's not fully protected."*
>
> *— An immigrant parent in Los Angeles County in a household earning more than $150,000*

Culture and Language

In parents' written responses, we found these two factors frequently became intertwined: some parents identified their strong preference for caregivers who share their cultural background, with several adding the importance of bilingual care. They present these connections as important for their child's cultural development and identity. While **Table 1** suggests these factors are not necessarily universal, our study reinforces that culture and language play a starring role for a subset of parents, particularly parents of color and immigrant parents.

> *"We have a nanny who is bilingual, and we have a bilingual household. Exposure to cultures is important to our family since we come from a multiple cultural background."*
>
> *— An immigrant parent in San Diego County in a household earning $75,000 to $100,000*

> *"My mother raised five children, including me. Her home is on the way to both my husband's and my job, and I feel absolutely safe with my daughter in her care. She is also the only child in her care, and we share the same culture. My daughter is biracial (my husband is White, and I am Black), and it was really important for me to make sure that she is cared for by someone who has a cultural connection to her."*
>
> *— A Black parent in Solano County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"I would like to have him with [his] current babysitter so he can learn more Vietnamese."*
>
> *— An Asian-Immigrant parent in Ventura County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

Family Bonding

Some parents in our study said they currently use FFN care as a way to promote family and intergenerational bonding. Parents shared with us that their choice to have their children cared for by family members, such as a grandmother, allows for additional bonding time between the child and the caretaker. Some parents position FFN care as the best supplement or stand-in for parental care when work prevents the parent from spending time with their children.

> *"Care by a family member is free, and she already has a close relationship with my children. It allows further bonding time and helps me when I can't be home myself to care for my kids."*
>
> *— A Black parent in Los Angeles County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"Grandma loves my children and cares for them. She is flexible and helps a lot around the house."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Fresno County in a household earning $75,000 to $100,000*

> *"I want him to spend time with family as much as possible, especially since I co-parent with my ex and have to share parenting time."*
>
> *— A multiracial parent in San Diego County in a household earning $75,000 to $100,000*

Shortages in Licensed Child Care

Long wait lists were a common occurrence in licensed care settings prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for infants and toddlers. Since the pandemic, these shortages have expanded and brought workforce challenges to the forefront of child care policy discussions. In parents' responses to our survey, long waitlists and classroom closures have led some parents to FFN or nanny care. These examples highlight the need for public investment in both licensed and license-exempt caregivers to stabilize the mixed-delivery system in California.

> *"There's extremely limited childcare availability (years long waitlist for facility-based care)."*
>
> *— An Asian parent in Sutter County in a household earning $100,000 to $149,999*

> *"Desperation. Their father and I both work full-time jobs in different cities an hour from our apartment, so we need someone we trust to drive our kids and care for them in our home. There was no day care availability with adequate health and safety measures, affordable cost, and availability. So a nanny for two kids was cheaper than finding day care for two kids in diapers. We have had the same nanny for 10 months, but we lose her to grad school next week and have no backup plan yet."*
>
> *— A White parent in Santa Cruz County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"I originally chose center-based care for my 10-month-old, but due to staffing shortages caused by the pandemic, the center we had chosen had to close their infant room. She will be able to join the center when she is 18 months old. Until then, her care is being covered by family members in and outside of our household."*
>
> *— A White parent in Sonoma County in a household earning more than $150,000*

Trust and Safety

While trust and safety are priorities that cut across types of care, several parents characterized FFN and nanny care as the safest option available—especially when the care takes place in the parent's home. The descriptions echo comments about the "best environment for the child," with emphasis on the safe and nurturing environment that FFN and nanny caregivers can provide.

> *"The caregiver is someone that we trust and has been there to help with the baby since they were born."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Fresno County in a household earning $50,000 to $74,999*

> *"I chose the arrangements for my two-year-old because I believe it's best he is with close family/friends I can trust, and for my three-year-old, I chose a center-based place because he has special needs, and since he used to receive therapy there, the people feel like family and love my child, which makes me feel that he's safe and taken care of."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Napa County in a household earning $25,000 to $50,000*

> *"We've chosen to give our girls as safe and caring an environment to grow up in as possible, so we've chosen to keep them close. I had awful experiences in preschool as a child, and I was too young to communicate what was happening and not take it as my fault. We have decided to teach our girls how to communicate and process their experiences and emotions (as much as they're able at their ages) and socialize them with family and people who we know love them and have their best interests at heart."*
>
> *— A White parent in Ventura County in a household earning $75,000 to $100,000*

In Their Words: Parents Who See FFN or Nanny Care as Ideal

Parents Who Would Prefer License-Exempt Care as the Primary Source of Child Care

Overall, parents with FFN or nanny caregivers valued care from someone they trust and who is familiar with their children. Parents express the sentiment that this option not only allows for closer family bonding, but also provides a sense of security in terms of the health and safety of their children. Primarily, many parents wished for more flexible options to be home with their children, especially during the pandemic, and some working parents appreciate the convenience of having a nanny or family member provide care in their own home, particularly if they work nearby. Additionally, for parents who are currently working from home, the use of a part-time caregiver can be a solution, but a full-time arrangement may be preferable.

> *"Ideally, I'd have a nanny or grandparent caring for the baby in my home and bringing her to me for feeding. (I work nearby.) For my older child, a combination of nanny and grandparent care has worked well, and I would like to continue it."*
>
> *— A White parent in Del Norte County in a household earning $75,000 to $100,000*

> *"[I] would love if grandparents could watch kids for some hours just for the relationship, but not all grandparents can/will do it. My current set-up with a preschool is ideal given that we don't have family close by."*
>
> *— An Asian parent in Los Angeles County in a household earning more than $150,000*

> *"Right now, being in group care during a pandemic is NERVE WRACKING. And we are in a situation where the majority of families are essential healthcare workers, so there is a heightened expectation of care and knowledge around COVID.... At the same time, if we had more flexible options to keep our child at home and in an environment where she wasn't exposed to so many people, that would be nice. Our older child is in public school, and we are not happy with the COVID safety measures of our local district. We think they are too lax and do not take the needs of disabled/immunocompromised people into consideration."*
>
> *— A White parent in Los Angeles County in a household earning more than $150,000*

> *"Because I am currently working from home, we chose a nanny who we could employ part-time. My ideal scenario would be what I have now—but full-time instead of part-time."*
>
> *— A White parent in Sacramento County in a household earning more than $150,000*

> *"My ideal arrangement allows the children to spend valuable time with grandpa."*
>
> *— A Black parent in Alameda in a household earning less than $25,000*

Parents Who Would Prefer License-Exempt Care as a Secondary Component of Child Care

Meanwhile, some parents in our study see FFN/nanny care as a secondary (but core) component in the care of their children. These parents value having their children spend time with family members or appreciate having a nanny who can provide additional support (such as pick-ups/drop-offs or care outside of school hours), but they also value a licensed group setting. Parents point to the benefits of these settings to provide opportunities for their children to interact with other children, learn and practice a second language, receive consistent care, and have flexibility in care arrangements.

> *"I think ideally it would be nice if my son went to a bilingual preschool where he is only there a few hours in the day—not all day—and my mother or mother-in-law could watch him for the rest of the day for me. This would be ideal because I would know my child is interacting with other children, learning, and practicing his Spanish, but not need to be there for eight hours."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Solano County in a household earning $100,000 to $150,000*

> *"I would love for my parents to live close by so that she would be cared for by both her parents and grandparents until age two or three. Then she would attend preschool where dropoffs/pickups can alternate between parents and grandparents. She would be watched by grandparents when we need babysitting on weekends or weeknights so that she grows close family bonds."*
>
> *— An Asian parent in Alameda County in a household earning less than $25,000*

> *"We'd love our girls to get a combination of time with their grandparents, playtime with their close friends in a church-based co-op, and have a nanny who is another safe, consistent presence in their lives."*
>
> *— A White parent in Los Angeles County in a household earning $75,000 to $100,000*

> *"My kid is in school for transitional kindergarten from 9 to 5, but it would be ideal if there were a person who could care for them an hour before school starts and the two or two and a half hours after school ends."*
>
> *— A Latina parent in Fresno County in a household earning more than $150,000*

> *"Ideally, our child would be with a trusted family member or friend and also in a program that is developmentally appropriate and safe."*
>
> *— A Black parent in Contra Costa County in a household earning more than $150,000*

Conclusion

In the first phase of our study, we found that FFN and nanny care hold unique value to parents, manifesting in highly varied arrangements for parents across race, income, and region in California. As policymakers consider best practices for enhancing access to high-quality early care and education—particularly with a mixed-delivery lens—the core goal should be to empower families to achieve their ideal arrangement. In certain cases, these arrangements might center on, or at least include, FFN or nanny care. Our research demonstrates a clear gap between current ECE usage and ideal arrangements, and parents of color are less likely to have access to their ideal.

To honor parents, policy discourse should embrace an expansive and flexible understanding of their wants and needs for care, where FFN and nanny care arrangements maintain even footing with licensed options. Parents should be included in policy development to help California's child care system evolve in an equitable direction.

While this report brings timely data on parents and their views of FFN and nanny care, a strong mixed-delivery system will require data on the caregivers themselves. Our next report will pivot to address the limited scope of existing research in this area. Specifically, we are conducting survey and focus group research with FFN and nanny caregivers to illuminate their experiences and well-being. We will also explore the caregiving context, to inform effective strategies for reaching and engaging with license-exempt providers.

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- California Alternative Payment Program Association
- Children Now
- Children's Home Society
- Children's Museum of Sonoma County
- County of San Luis Obispo Public Libraries
- Door to Hope
- Early Edge
- Escuela De La Raza Unida
- Every Neighborhood
- First 5 Association
- First 5 California
- First 5 Yuba County
- Fresno Unified
- Humboldt County Office of Education
- Kids Discovery Station
- KidZone Museum
- La Luz Center
- Lawrence Hall of Science
- Mission Economic Development Agency
- Oakland Head Start
- Santa Barbara County Libraries
- Sierra Nevada Children's Services
- Siskiyou County Office of Education
- Sonoma County Office of Education
- Southern Marin Moms
- Stanislaus County Child Care and Development Local Planning Council
- Tehama County Local Child Care Planning Council
- El Dorado County Early Care and Education Planning Council
- Fresno County Child Care and Development Local Planning Council
- United We Lead Foundation

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Parent Preferences in Family, Friend, Neighbor, and Nanny Care

A Study of Family, Friend, Neighbor, and Nanny Care in California - Part One

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Technical Appendices

Details on our weighting methodology can be found in the Technical Appendices, a separate document available for download on the report website. Additionally, the Appendices include tables by race/ethnicity, income, and region within California.

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The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), founded in 1999, is the national leader in early care and education workforce research and policy. CSCCE provides research and analysis on the preparation, working conditions, and compensation of the early care and education workforce. We develop policy solutions and create spaces for teaching, learning, and educator activism. Our vision is an effective public early care and education system that secures racial, gender, and economic justice for the women whose labor is the linchpin of stable, quality services.

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