

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF BOULDER COUNTY, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methodology

- The researchers surveyed a random sample of Boulder County households with children age 0-5 in order to collect data that are representative of all families, as well as targeted samples of Spanish-speaking families and families with special needs children.
- We completed surveys with a random sample of 400 Boulder County families with at least one child age zero (0) through five years old. Families were interviewed over the telephone and gave extensive information about their child care use and needs.
- The targeted sample of Spanish-speaking parents completed 69 surveys, and the targeted sample of special needs parents completed 14 surveys.

Description of Random Survey Respondents

- Boulder county respondents are primarily non-Hispanic white, well-educated and have relatively high incomes. Only one-quarter are low income, with 2008 total annual household incomes below \$60,000. In 2007, the median income in Boulder County was \$64,299, which indicates that half of Boulder County families had higher incomes and half had lower incomes. Income most likely has increased since 2007; however, low income families may be somewhat underrepresented among survey respondents.
- We asked parents about children who have not been identified as having special needs but who exhibit challenging behaviors. Six percent of families report having a child with challenging behaviors. The 26 children with challenging behaviors were most likely to exhibit: difficulty listening, paying attention and following directions; poor social skills; and tantrums. Interestingly, two parents said that their child's challenging behavior was that their child is gifted and talented.
- In all, 15 families were at risk of homelessness or did not have enough food; one family reported that they both are at risk of homelessness and did not have enough food.

Child Currently in Child Care

- Fully three-quarters of surveyed families currently have at least one child age 0-5 in regular child care. Low income families are significantly less likely than higher income families to use child care.
- Families primarily need child care so they can work and, to a lesser extent, so their child can socialize/interact with other children and to help their child learn/prepare for school.
- Parents were asked if each of a series of potential problems was a “major,” “moderate,” or “minor” problem or “not a problem” when looking for child care for their child. A majority of parents said that each problem was “not a problem” when they were looking for child care. The biggest problem was finding affordable child care, which was a “major” or “moderate” problem for nearly one-third of parents.
- The great majority of survey respondents were very satisfied with all aspects of their child’s child care. This is equally true for low income families. Boulder residents are less satisfied with cost than residents of other Boulder County communities, probably because they pay much more per month for child care than persons in other Boulder County communities.
- A majority of children are in a preschool program, including Head Start. A total of more than two-fifths are in a home care situation, either cared for in their own home or in someone else’s home. One-quarter are in a child care center. Most families said that their provider is licensed.
- We asked parents whether they needed different types of “extra” child care. Parents were most likely to need before or after school care, back-up care when their provider was not available, and evening care (from 6-11 pm) in the past year. At least 30 percent of parents said they needed each of these types of care, and most parents said they could usually get these types of care when they needed it. More generally, with the exception of sick child care, at least three-quarters of parents usually could get “extra” care when they needed it.
- On average, families have their child in child care for 20 hours per week. A majority of children are in child care 4-5 days in a typical week. Slightly more than half of children are mainly in full-day care.
- On average, families pay \$656 per month for child care for all of their children age 0-5. This average (mean) is skewed by families who have very expensive child care, because the median (middle) payment is \$425 per month.

Not in Child Care

- The unmet need for child care is relatively small: only 25 families are currently looking for child care. While parents with a child currently in care and parents looking for care both said that cost and a situation that feels comfortable were the two biggest problems when looking for child care, a much greater proportion of parents looking for care cited each as a “major” or “moderate” problem. Parents looking for care also were substantially more likely to say that finding care that is conveniently located and finding quality care are a “major” or “moderate” problem.
- Parents were asked what kind of child care arrangement they would prefer. Almost half wanted their child to attend a pre-school program, including Head Start. Few parents preferred care in their home or in someone else’s home, and few preferred a child care center.
- On average, families anticipate needing 18 hours of care per week. The greatest proportion wanted care for three days in a typical week. Fully three-quarters said they will need part-day rather than full-day care.
- Slightly less than half of families who are looking for child care are aware that there is financial assistance available for child care for low income families. On average, families looking for care said that they can afford to pay \$479 per month for child care; the median (middle) amount that families can pay per month is considerably lower -- \$300. The range in what families can afford is substantial, from no money to \$1,500 per month.

Low Income Families

- Almost one-quarter of surveyed families are low income, that is, they earned less than \$60,000 total income in 2008. Respondents living in low income families have less education than higher income respondents. Low-income families are four times as likely as higher income families to be Hispanic, and five times as likely to live in single parent families. More than half of low income families live in Longmont, compared to one-third of higher income families. Low income families are less likely than other families to live in Boulder, Louisville-Superior, or Erie
- While lower income families are substantially less likely than higher income families to have a child currently in child care, the unmet need is greater among low income families. This is partly due to the fact that they face greater problems finding affordable child care than higher income families.
- Low income families are substantially more likely to say that finding affordable child care is a “major” or “moderate” problem when looking for child care than higher income families. Lower income families also are somewhat more likely to say that discrimination is a problem when looking for child care, but think it is a “minor” rather than a “major” or “moderate” problem.

- Low-income and higher income families with a child age 0-5 in child care are equally likely to have their child go to a child care center or preschool including Head Start. Low-income families are more than three times as likely to have their child cared for in a relative's home, and they also are somewhat more likely to have a relative care for their child in the child's home. Taken together, these differences may be cultural – low-income families are substantially more likely to be Hispanic.
- Low-income and higher income families are equally satisfied with the various aspects of their child's child care, including quality of care, convenience, cost, safety, type of care, and overall care.
- Higher income families pay almost twice as much each month for child care for all of their children age 0-5 as low-income families: \$724 versus \$369.

Comparison by City

- Two-fifths (40.0%) of survey respondents live in Longmont. One-fifth (20.0%) live in Boulder, 15 percent in Louisville/Superior, 13 percent in Lafayette, nine percent (8.8%) in Erie, and three percent (3.3%) live in other Boulder County communities.
- Longmont residents are more likely than residents of other communities to be Hispanic and to have fewer years of education. Longmont and Lafayette families are most likely to be low income.
- Although a majority of families in every Boulder County community have a child age 0-5 who is currently in regular child care, Louisville/Superior families are most likely, and Longmont families least likely, to have a child in child care.
- The data suggest that Boulder and Longmont residents are able to find child care that is more conveniently located than residents of other Boulder County communities.
- Boulder residents are least satisfied with the cost of their child's child care. Residents of all Boulder County communities are equally likely to have their child age 0-5 in full-time child care. Despite this, Boulder residents pay substantially more for child care than residents of other Boulder County communities. This explains their relatively low satisfaction with the cost of child care.
- On average, Boulder respondents pay \$972 per month for child care for all of their children age 0-5. Lafayette respondents pay an average of \$729 per month for child care, and Louisville respondents pay an average of \$671 each month for child care. Respondents in the other Boulder County communities pay an average of \$500 or less for child care each month.

Special Needs Children

- Ten percent of survey respondents have at least one child age 0-5 who has been identified as having special needs. Most of these children have speech/language problems, and about two-fifths have physical problems.
- Most parents of a special needs child who responded to the random sample telephone survey, and all parents in the targeted survey, reported that their child has special needs in speech/language. About two-fifths of respondents to each survey reported their child has a physical special need. Emotional/behavioral special needs are twice as prevalent in the targeted survey sample as in the telephone survey.
- Four-fifths of telephone survey respondents compared to two-fifths of targeted survey respondents said that their special needs child is in child care.
- Parents of special needs children who currently are in child care reported that the biggest problems were finding quality child care and finding a provider and situation that feels comfortable.
- None of the special needs children currently in child care, as described in the targeted survey, are in a child care center. Most are cared for in their own or someone else's home, and several are in a preschool program, including Head Start. Only one parent reported that their provider is licensed.
- Families of special needs children generally were satisfied with their child care arrangement, although they were less satisfied on average than the families in the random sample survey. They were least satisfied with how their provider deals with their child's special needs, and with the cost of child care.

Spanish-Speaking Families

- All of the targeted Spanish-speaking families are low income. Targeted survey respondents have relatively low education levels. Parents whose children are not in child care have lower education than parents whose children currently are in care.
- Of the 69 Spanish-speaking families that completed targeted surveys, slightly more than half have at least one child age 0-5 currently in child care. Similar to random sample survey parents, these parents primarily need child care so that they can work. The second most frequently cited reason for needing child care is to help their child learn/prepare for school, probably because a majority of these families have a four or five year old child in care. Targeted survey respondents were less likely than random sample survey respondents to need child care so their child could socialize/interact with other children.

- Fewer than half of parents said that any listed problem was a “major” or “moderate” problem when looking for child care. The biggest problems were finding child care that is available the days and times they need, finding child care that they can easily get to considering their transportation situation, and finding quality child care. In contrast, random sample survey respondents said that the biggest problem was finding affordable child care.
- Three-fifths of children are in a preschool program, including Head Start, and half are in a home care situation (in their own or someone else’s home). Very few children are in a child care center. Fewer than half said that their provider is licensed.
- We asked parents if they needed different types of “extra” care. Parents were most likely to need before or after-school care, back-up care when their provider was not available, summer care and sick child care. Parents usually could get care when they needed it.
- On average, families have their child in child care for almost 27 hours per week. Half are in care five days a week, and one-quarter are in care four days a week. Nearly three-fifths said that their child is in part-day care.
- Spanish-speaking families are very satisfied with their child care arrangements.
- On average, families pay \$146 per month for child care. One-fifth receive financial assistance for child care.
- Thirty-two Spanish-speaking families do not currently have their child in child care. Two-thirds of this group said that they currently need child care or are looking for child care because they will need it in the near future. Unmet need is much higher for this group than in the random sample survey.
- A majority of parents looking for care said that each listed problem was a “major” or “moderate” problem. Similar to the random sample survey, parents who are looking for care report substantially higher problems finding child care than those parents whose children are currently in care.
- Parents were asked what kind of child care arrangement they would prefer. Most parents wanted either a child care center or a preschool program including Head Start.
- On average, families anticipate needing 24 hours of care per week. Half wanted care for five days each week. Nearly half said that they will need part day care, almost one-third will need full day care, and one-quarter anticipate needing a combination of full and part-day care.
- Just 30 percent of families who are looking for child care are aware that there is financial assistance available for low income families. On average, families looking for care said that they can afford to pay \$97.50 per month for child care.