



SANTA CLARA AND SAN BENITO COUNTY CHILD CARE WORKFORCE STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey Overview

In 2024-2025, the Santa Clara County Local Early Education Planning Council (LPC) partnered with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) to develop a workforce study of child care providers in Santa Clara County (SCC) and San Benito County (SBC). The aim of the workforce study was to help inform the use of public resources to support child care and early learning, such as informing recruitment, retention, and pay equity efforts in the Santa Clara County and San Benito County early childhood education (ECE) field. Moreover, the workforce study findings are intended to build on learnings from the 2023 Santa Clara County Child Care Needs Assessment.

The survey was administered through an online survey platform between November 12, 2024 and December 20, 2024. There were 238 responses received, representing Santa Clara County (89%) and San Benito County (11%).

Key Findings

- **Nearly half (46%) of respondents reported that while they can afford the cost of living in their area, they do not have money left over for savings.**
Many providers cited inflation and persistently low wages in the ECE sector as key contributors to declining quality of life and increased financial stress. One in five respondents indicated they struggle to afford rent or mortgage payments, and over 15% reported working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Respondents reported working over 40 hours per week in their primary role (46%).
- **One in five child care providers surveyed have utilized public benefits such as Medi-Cal, WIC, and CalFresh in the last two years.**
Only half of respondents surveyed indicated that they receive employee benefits. Respondents from small family child care homes were statistically more likely to have used public benefits compared to those in licensed child care and large family child care centers. Among those who reported using public benefits and assistance, 88% used Medi-Cal, 24% used WIC, and 17% used CalFresh.

- **Providers identified key challenges, including insufficient support for children with high needs, low wages, and staffing shortages, as major factors contributing to negative experiences in the ECE field.**

Some providers shared that they need more support to address the rise in challenging classroom behaviors since the COVID-19 pandemic. Others noted that although students often have individualized education plans (IEPs), educators lack adequate training and support to effectively meet these needs. More than half of respondents reported needing additional training in social-emotional learning (61%), supporting children with disabilities (53%), and promoting positive behavior (51%).

- **Respondents with over 20 years of experience in ECE were significantly more likely to report feeling "exhausted" compared to those newer to the field.**

In contrast, respondents with 0-5 years of experience in the field were more likely to indicate that they were “motivated.” This stark difference points to a potential generational divide in workforce satisfaction and highlights growing concerns about burnout among veteran providers.

- **Child care providers ranked (1) higher salaries and (2) better benefits as their top workplace priorities for the next 3-5 years.**

Respondents emphasized that low wages contribute to high turnover and limit opportunities for professional growth within the field. While providers expressed a deep passion for working in ECE, many felt that staying in the field is not financially sustainable.

Recommendations

- **Expand support services for students with disabilities.** Provide support services for students with disabilities, including trainings on how to support students.
- **Create structured feedback systems to bridge the gap between providers and county and state agencies.** Establish structured feedback channels, such as listening sessions and collaborative workgroups, to ensure providers’ voices are heard, particularly in response to changes such as transitional kindergarten (TK) expansion.
- **Lead advocacy efforts to improve working conditions for the ECE workforce.** Promote policies that increase provider pay to reflect the true cost of care and expand access to benefits such as retirement plans and affordable health insurance.
- **Strengthen the ECE workforce pipeline.** Invest in workforce development programs and career pathways that attract and retain new educators to ensure a sustainable and well-supported child care workforce.