



California Budget & Policy Center

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 (916) 444-0500

 calbudgetcenter.org

 contact@calbudgetcenter.org

 1107 9th Street, Suite 310
Sacramento, CA 95814

Southern Monterey County

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Virtual - Zoom

About the focus group

- **Number of Attendees:** Four parents attended this virtual focus group.
- **Communities Represented:** Greenfield
- **Number of Children:**
 - One parent had one child
 - Two parents had two children
 - One parent had three children
- **Ages of Children:** Ages ranged from 9 months to 9 years.

Types of Care

Parents in this group had different experiences seeking child care. Some parents are trying to return to work but can't because they're unable to find providers who take younger children. Others have to arrange complicated work schedules to alternate care with their spouse, and others seek unlicensed care to fill the gaps.

There's limited access to child care in Greenfield. There are some centers in both Greenfield and King City, but they're mostly full and some are exclusively for migrant families working in agriculture. Families say that there are more opportunities for child care in Salinas compared to Greenfield. A mother mentioned she has considered a job in Salinas for that reason, but it would be difficult to arrange drop off because she has two other children in school.

Unlicensed care fills the gaps for families as a last resort, but families prefer licensed providers. One of the parents shared that she couldn't find a preschool spot for one of her daughters who did not qualify for Transitional Kindergarten due to age, and that she had to

rely on an unlicensed provider that she luckily knew and trusted. This arrangement allowed her to work. However, now with an infant she would like to find a licensed provider who is specifically trained to work with younger children. Moreover, parents know that centers have to follow specific regulations, making it safer for their children.

Context for the Unmet Need in Monterey County

Overall, families in Greenfield have limited access to child care. There's at least one center, but none of the families are eligible, and parents end up having to rely on unlicensed care that meets their immediate need of being able to go to work.

Availability of Affordable Child Care

Lack of infant and toddler care forces parents to delay their return to work. A parent shared that now that she has a baby, she can't find a program, and can't return to work. She knows there's a program, but it's full. Other parents commented that there are two centers that accept children under age two, but one is only for migrant families and the other is full (and only provides services until 1pm). A parent mentioned that given this context, she will likely plan to wait until the child is older and when they feel more comfortable leaving them with an unlicensed provider.

"But leaving him in a house with someone, no, this little, no. So right now, I'm at home. I take them to school, I pick them up from school, but until I can work and find someone who can take care of him, I can't go back to work, or I'll have to wait until he's old enough to leave him."

Some parents choose jobs that allow them to alternate child care responsibilities with their spouse. Several mothers shared how their husbands take care of the children during the day while they work, and when they return, their husbands go to work at night. This also allows them to pick up their other children from school; however with infants, this is harder to do.

Parent Preferences for Child Care

Families have a preference for programs with licensed providers, like centers, because they focus on children's development and learning. Several parents commented on the importance of providers creating an environment where children are

supported with their development, including language development, literacy, establishing routines, socializing, and, for infants, developing motor skills.

"So what I would look for is, well, for them to teach the children, like, for example, if I were to take my little one, for them to help him do things like right now he crawls and now he stands up and tries to walk. And well, I would also like for them to read to them, at least, like, a center where they care for them, but the children also learn, not just watch TV and that's it, like just to keep them busy, no."

In general, the hours offered by child care programs do not align with parents' work schedules. One parent shared that even if she were able to enroll in a subsidized program, it wouldn't work because the program ends at 1 p.m., but she usually finishes work at 3:30 p.m. She would need to find someone to pick up her child and care for them for the remaining hours since she can't leave work any earlier.

State-Supported Child Care

Families have a difficult time with the process of applying for state-subsidized programs. Several parents shared how they tried to apply for a center in Greenfield but got denied because while they work in agriculture, the program is specifically designed for families who have to move from one city to another for work.

State-supported programs are full and families have to navigate being placed on a waitlist. Families know that waitlists are long, and the wait time can extend for months and even years. Also, it's easy for families to lose their spot if they don't respond promptly or if they are missing any documents. In that case, programs move on to the next family. A parent, for example, shared how she received a call a year after applying and by then her income had changed and she no longer qualified.

"The spots are full, and then there's a waiting list. If you don't respond, they move on to the next person, or if you don't have the documents or if it's based on income. I once applied for my daughter, and they didn't call me until about a year later. By the time I went, my family's income had already changed, and we no longer qualified. So then it became another issue: okay, now we don't qualify because of income, even though we were on the list, now we no longer qualify and have to look for another program."

Other Options

As mentioned in other sections, families rely on a mix of different child care options, including unlicensed care. Families don't fully trust providers whom they don't know, or they hesitate to utilize unlicensed care because they might not have the training to focus on their children's development, especially for younger children.

Relationship-Related Assets

Families organize a mix of child care arrangements to be able to work. As previously mentioned, in some two-parent families, one of the parents opts for a night shift in order to provide care while the other parent works during the day. One of the parents shared how they arrange drop off for their child in Transitional Kindergarten and pay an unlicensed provider to fill the gaps until they finish work.

Parents look for child care options in many places, including their workplace. One of the parents who did not qualify for the migrant child care program, found a colleague at work whose daughter was a licensed home-based provider and the parent was able to enroll her child there. This provider was not part of the migrant child care program, which allowed the family to enroll.

Parents get some support from other family members, but that's also difficult. Many parents in this focus group don't have a lot of family around and their friends are also busy taking care of their own needs. Some parents that live with other family members get some child care support, where they're able to help a bit, but family members also have their own children and responsibilities.

Child Care Priorities

Community-Specific Priorities

New child care centers should be away from pesticides used in agricultural fields.

One parent shared her concerns with centers and schools being built too close to agricultural fields, where pesticides are used that can be harmful to children. When considering new centers, this should be taken into consideration.

Age Group-Specific Priorities

Families would like more options for infant and toddler care. As previously mentioned, there are limited child care options for children younger than two in Greenfield. Parents said that there are two centers that accept children under age two, however, one is for migrant families only, and the other is full and only offers services until 1 p.m. Having more options for infant and toddler care would benefit families, especially those looking to rejoin the workforce.

"I think from six months to two years. There isn't anything nearby specifically for that, and that isn't income-based. There's nothing like that here."

Parents who work in agriculture need care during non-traditional hours. Families start work earlier than the traditional 9am start. Parents carpool to worksites and need to be ready hours before they start, depending on where they work for the day. This means that families need to be able to drop off their children very early so they can be ready for work. Moreover, some parents also work night shifts and may need overnight care.

Information for Policymakers

Throughout the conversation, parents commented on helpful and harmful child care policies in their communities. Those are summarized as follows:

Helpful policies

Parents find it helpful when they receive support from child care center staff to fill out documents to apply for services. One parent mentioned how helpful and empathetic staff were in helping with completing the process and eventually enroll her child. However, this support is not consistent in their experiences.

Harmful policies

Income requirements for state-subsidized programs exclude families who need access. Parents shared that it's unrealistic to qualify for a program that they need while also covering the cost of other essential needs, such as housing and food, which have continued to rise. Some parents have to work overtime to cover their expenses, which disqualifies them from state-subsidized child care. However, their income is still not enough to afford private child care.

Recommendations

Throughout the conversation parents shared recommendations to improve access and delivery of child care services. Those include the following:

Expand the number of providers that provide infant and toddler care in Greenfield.

As mentioned above, there's a lack of infant and toddler child care in Greenfield compared to Salinas. Families with infants would like more licensed providers who are trained in working with these age groups.

Make changes to income eligibility. As mentioned in the previous sections, families work to cover the costs of meeting their basic needs, but that also means that, given their higher income, they don't qualify for state-subsidized child care. At the same time, this doesn't mean that they can pay for child care. One parent suggested charging a certain percentage to those families that go over the limit rather than excluding them, especially if that means having access to infant care.

Open more licensed child care centers with highly qualified staff. Families also commented that even changing income eligibility requirements does not mean that they'll be able to find a spot given the lack of centers. Opening more centers can address this gap and provide families with professional and experienced providers.

"I would also say that a place that is certified, where all the staff are certified, have a degree, or have education or a background in early childhood education."

Child care programs should offer age-appropriate activities that mix development, literacy, and enrichment. These activities ensure that children learn skills and that their brains are stimulated and their development is supported.

"We're going to take care of children because that's what I've seen here, at least in the two centers where I had my daughter. It's just like preschool and that's it. It's just learning your ABCs, learning your name, singing a few songs, and that's it. There's nothing extra. There's no art, no music, no sign language for babies or anything. I would like there to be a little more enrichment in the program—not just about, 'Okay, I'm going to leave my baby there, and they'll be clean and well-fed.'"

Support potential providers in Greenfield to become licensed and provide

home-based care. One parent mentioned that she knows people who are obtaining their license to become providers but that regulations limit them to 10 children, which means that more of these centers are needed.

Ensure parents who work at night have access to child care. Many parents in Greenfield work in packaging plants that offer both day and night shifts. It's not always easy to choose one shift or the other, and people who have been at the job for a longer period of time get priority to choose, and they often choose daytime shifts, which means that newer workers have to work at night. This means that families have to arrange child care to be able to work, and families would like to see more options for these workers with children.

Match child care program hours with agricultural work seasons and daily schedules. As mentioned in other sections, parents who work in agriculture start work early in the morning and need to drop off their children before they head out, sometimes as early as 5 a.m. Moreover, some centers close during the summer days or in December to align with school schedules, however, this impacts families because they are likely to be working during those months.

More emphasis on recruiting and supporting child care providers. One parent suggested tapping into college students who are interested in early childhood education and making it simple for potential providers to get into the profession. Additionally, there are others who are interested but they don't have the space at home to offer services, therefore more centers would bring more providers onboard.