

WHAT FAMILIES TELL US ABOUT EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

In 2023, Pulse was charged with developing a comprehensive early learning and care plan for seven counties in southwest Michigan – Berrien, Branch, Cass, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren.

Pulse partnered with the RAPID Survey Project at Stanford University to support our gathering of family voices so that early learning and care professionals, policymakers, funders, economic and workforce developers, intermediaries and business leaders can make recommendations reflective of what families say they need.

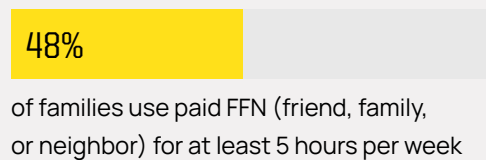
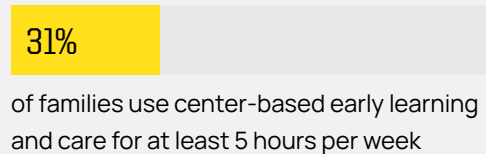
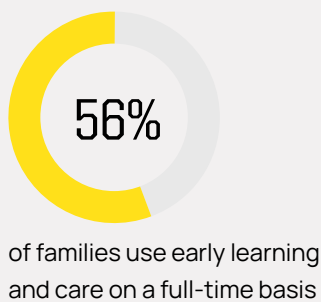
As Pulse works to build understanding about what the people who teach and care for young children do, we are also shifting our language from 'child care' to 'early learning and care.' You'll see that reflected in this community profile, where we share how families use early learning and care, what their ideal care arrangement would look like, and their experiences applying for and using the state child care subsidy from the Child Development and Care Program.

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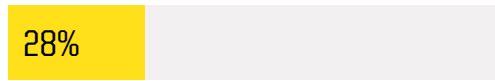


Pulse is a partner, advocate and coach, improving early childhood development in Michigan. By making bold moves, Pulse works with key partners to ensure sufficient resources are available for equitable access to quality early childhood experiences, create and improve learning environments, and promote the healthy development of children.

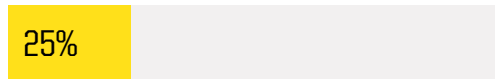
How do southwest Michigan families use early learning and care?



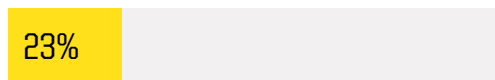
What would an ideal early learning and care arrangement look like for parents?



Parents reported their most ideal arrangement when they were a new parent would have been extended leave



Parents also favored FFN care outside their home



and FFN care in their home

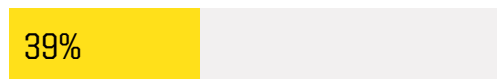
If all types of arrangements were equally priced and accessible, parents reported their top three ideal arrangements would be:



a relative



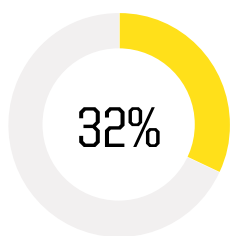
a Head Start program



or a home-based early learning and care provider

“It took us over 7 months to find child care – wait times were 12 to 24 months at most places in the Kalamazoo/Portage area. We drive 40 minutes to an in-home center in Plainwell/Cooper or daycare.”
Parent in Portage

The state child care subsidy is helpful, but some parents experience barriers



of families surveyed did not apply for a subsidy because they were unsure if they were eligible. This was the top reason.

More Black and Latinx families applied for a subsidy than did white families.



Yet, just over 60% of Black and Latinx families received a subsidy,



compared to 96% of white families.

Black, Latinx and other non-white parents had much more difficulty finding a provider to accept the subsidy, than did white parents.



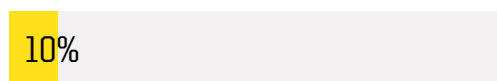
Black families



Latinx families

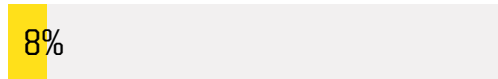


Families of other races and ethnicities



White families

“I am stuck in a job I hate because I can’t afford child care if I leave. If I stay at home, we don’t make enough money to pay all of our bills.”
Parent in Kalamazoo



Few white parents reported difficulty maintaining* their subsidy,



compared to Latinx parents



Black parents

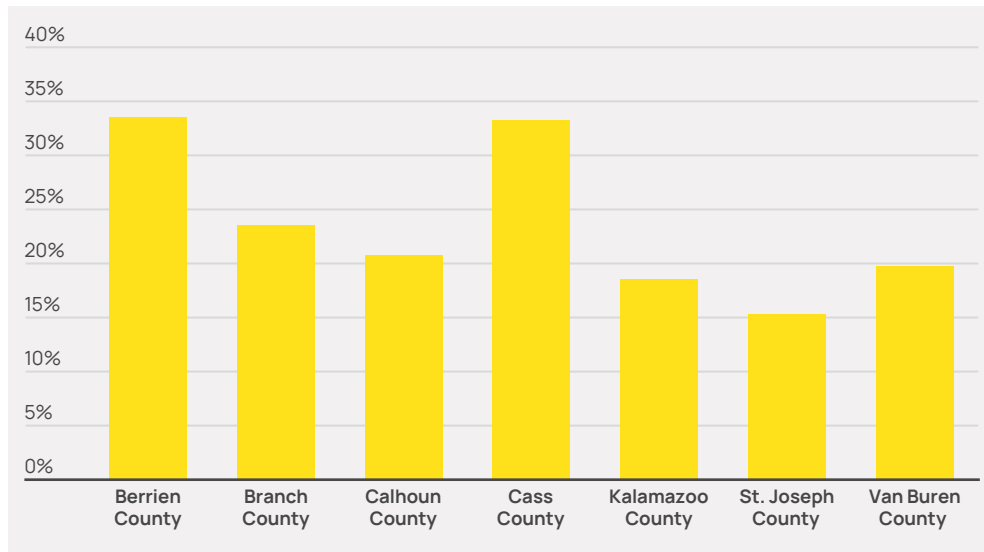


and parents of other racial and ethnic groups (Asian American, Native American/Pacific Islander, and other groups).

* (e.g., paperwork delays, recertification rules, etc.),

“There are not enough options for quality childcare in southwest Michigan that are affordable and safe for children. Parents have to work to provide for the family and child care should not be cost prohibitive for families to have peace of mind.”
Parent in St. Joseph

Percent of families with difficulty finding a provider to accept their subsidy, by county



Families in Cass and Berrien counties (33%) had more difficulty finding a provider to accept their subsidy. St. Joseph County families (15%) found it the least difficult.

“[Our] child care center provides a safe, fun, and educational learning environment for my children. This allows me and my husband to focus on our work.”
Parent in White Pigeon

RAPID partners with cities, counties, and states to gather essential and ongoing information and caregiver voices, provide timely and relevant data to inform local policies and programs, and develop the capacity of local organizations to employ rapid-cycle survey methods and enhance the impact of their work on behalf of child, families and the child care workforce.